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PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY
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BY EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE, PRINTERS, SAVOY STREET, STRAND

TO THE INHABITANTS

OF ALTON BARNES, AND ALTON PRIORS,

THESE SERMONS ARE DEDICATED

ACCORDING TO THE DESIRE

OF THEIR LATE AFFECTIONATE MINISTER,

WHOSE DYING PRAYERS,

THOUGH HE WAS ABSENT FROM THEM IN THE BODY,

WERE OFFERED UP

FOR HIS BELOVED PEOPLE.

ADVERTISEMENT.

A wish having been exprest by the Bishop of Chester, that a portion of the following Sermons should be published in such a manner as to be procurable at a less price than that of the whole collection, the Editor has thought himself bound to comply with the recommendation of that excellent Prelate; and the volumes of this New Edition are therefore printed with distinct title-pages, so as to be sold separately. Moreover, as these Sermons are generally acknowledged to be fitted above most others for the instruction of the lower orders, care has been taken that each Sermon shall begin with a new leaf, so that they who are inclined may cut up a volume and lend the single Sermons about among the poor.

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SERMONS.

SERMON I.

THE PREACHER'S BLESSING;

OR,

THE HAPPY NEW YEAR.

NUMBERS vi. 22—26.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

SUCH, my brethren, was the blessing which Aaron and his successors, the Jewish Priests, were to pronounce by the Lord's appointment over the people of God; and I know no words of pious greeting better suited to this day. New Year's Day so

seldom falls on a Sunday, that, when it does, it would be a pity to let it slip, without wishing you all a happy new year, according to the good old English custom. But, as Jesus Christ once said to his disciples, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you,"—meaning that his gifts are very different from those of the world,—so it becomes the minister of Jesus Christ to say to you on this occasion, "Not as the world wisheth, wish I unto you;" meaning thereby, that the happiness he wishes for you is something very different from what the world commonly esteems such. The world's notion of happiness, and the gospel notion of happiness, are very different; and therefore the world's wishes for your happiness, and the preacher's wishes for your happiness, must be very different also. The world, when it wishes a man happiness, means a long life, and strong health, and plenty of money, and a good name, and a thriving family. The preacher, on the other hand, when he wishes you happiness, as I wish you all now, means something very different thereby. What! (you will perhaps ask,) do I not then wish you life and riches? Yes, my dear brethren, I wish you, and pray God to give you these things, and far more abundantly than the world can wish them for you,—even a life without end, and an inheritance more to be desired

than gold, a crown eternal in the heavens. These are the wishes of the preacher, these are his prayers in your behalf,—everlasting life and everlasting glory after your departure out of this world; and, during your stay on earth, a sound body, a healthy soul, a name in the Book of Life, and a household affectionate and dutiful, lovers of God and of his will. Such is the difference between the good wishes of the world and the good wishes of the preacher. The world's good wishes are like itself, worldly: they look chiefly to the body: they reach not beyond earth, and the things of earth. Whereas the good wishes of the preacher are chiefly for your souls: he looks, and by his office is bound to look, first to the one thing needful: his desires for your welfare are guided by the gospel, and like that would raise you up to heaven. Even with regard to this world, the preacher knows full well, that the greatest happiness we can any of us enjoy, is a peaceful mind, a quiet conscience, the feeling that God is reconciled to us, and loves us, and cares for us, and watches over us, and will so order and arrange whatever may befall us, that all things shall work together for our good.

These are the very best gifts,—they are the truest good, which any man can have in this life: and they are all contained in the text. Therefore, what the Jewish priests were commanded to

say to their people at seasons of joy and blessing, the same words do I now utter as a New Year's prayer for the whole of my parishioners and my people. To every one of you, my friends, I say, in the words of Moses: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious to thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." This is my prayer in your behalf. May each of you, young and old, male and female, master and servant, may each of you take the words home to your hearts! and may God Almighty hear them, and bring them all to pass, to your great and endless good!

But let us look at the text a little in detail; and let us keep in mind, that this solemn blessing was of God's own appointment; so that we may expect to find mention of all those things which he knows to be best for his people. The first words are, "The Lord bless thee!" that is, the Lord give thee every good gift, and pour down on thee in due abundance whatever is wholesome and profitable, for thy soul first, and also for thy body. "The Lord keep thee!" that is, the Lord watch over thee for good, and shield thee from every kind of evil. Here we have already prayed for everything that is good for you; and have called on the Almighty (think of that word) to guard you

against your enemies of every kind, and to defend you from all sorts of dangers. Is not this enough? Can we wish for anything more? We perhaps might have thought it enough; but God in his bounty does not. At least he is pleased to shew forth the overflowings of his loving-kindness by heaping blessing upon blessing. The text goes on thus: "The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious to thee." You all know the difference of feel between a sunshiny and a cloudy day. The real heat may be the same; nay, the cloudy may be warmer than the sunshiny: for we often have bright sunshine in the clear frosty days of winter, and heavy clouds in the middle of summer. But though the real heat may be the same on both days,—though the thermometer, as it is called, or the glass which measures heat, may tell us that the cloudy day is the warmer of the two,—yet to our feelings it may be quite the contrary. There is something so enlivening in the sun, that I have often known persons come in from a walk on a bright winter's day, and speak of it as very pleasant; while the same persons, on a damp cloudy evening in July, would be the first to shiver, and to wish for a fire. Now the difference which it makes to a man's body, whether the sun is shining upon him, the same difference does it make to his soul, whether God's face is shining

on him or no. Let God's face shine on the soul, it walks in the brightest sunshine: let God veil his face, and cloud it over, the soul feels chilled and is discomforted. Thus it is written, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." (Psalm xxx. 7.)

Think not, my brethren, that this is a small blessing. I said, that we often feel the cold on a sunshiny day in winter less than on a cloudy day in summer. Now is not something answering to this often met with in the world? Do we not see many a man disquieted and ill at ease in the midst of riches and luxuries; while his poor neighbour, who lives in some sorry hovel, may look always cheerful and contented? What is this difference owing to? Not to the health and strength of the poor man: for he may be old, and often a sufferer from cold and wet; and he cannot afford to buy himself the little comforts suited to his years and infirmities. The rich man, on the other hand, may still be young: his disease, if it can be called one, is more of the mind than of the body: he can consult the best physicians: he can travel from place to place in search of pleasure: he is not forced to deny himself any one earthly thing that may tend to his ease and enjoyment. Yet with all this, in spite of his youth and riches, in spite of his having no outward ailment, and possessing every

comfort and luxury that heart could wish for, he may be always growling and grumbling; while the dweller in the old hovel, with the pinching frost of poverty and age, and sometimes sickness to boot, sharp upon him, may be ever making the best of his condition, and finding out something in it to thank God for. This is no mere dream of what might be. Those who see much of the rich and of the poor, may find instances of discontented rich men, and contented poor men, in every part of the land. What then is this difference owing to? To what cause must we trace the gloomy spirit of the one, who has every worldly good to satisfy him, and the blithe-hearted contentedness of the other, whose lot in the world's eyes is so hard and wretched? The cause is simply this, that the poor man I have been speaking of,—for what I have said is true only of such,—has led a Christian life, or at least has turned to God in earnest, and repented of his sins betimes; and so God has allowed his face to shine upon him and to cheer him: while his rich neighbour has been led astray by the deceitfulness of riches, and has been so taken up with his pleasures, or with the cares which riches brings with it, that he could not spare time to think about God. He has turned his face away from God: therefore God has turned away his face from him,

and left him in clouds and heaviness. O, my brethren, that you might but know and feel the joy and gladness which the light of God's face can shed on the soul of the Christian! Wherever it shines, it cheers and warms, and even gilds and beautifies the lowliest and meanest lot. Where it is wanting, earthly wealth and grandeur can no more make amends for it, than the blaze of lamps and the glare of torches could have made amends for the absence of the sun during those three days of Egyptian darkness, when the people, who had disobeyed the voice of the Lord, were plagued with that thick darkness, which, Moses tells us, "could be felt."

The next blessing we come to is, "The Lord be gracious to thee!" that is, the Lord receive thy prayers, and hearken to them, as a kind and merciful king hearkens to the petitions of his subjects. That this is one of the things meant by "being gracious," we know from a passage in the book of Exodus (xxii. 27), where God says of himself, "When the poor man crieth to me, I will hear; for I am gracious." Here the graciousness of God is declared to consist in his hearing prayer. But God is also called gracious in Scripture, because he forgives sin. Thus, in the book of Nehemiah (ix. 17), we find him called "a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful." In the book of Jonah

(iv. 2), the prophet says, "I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." Again, in the 77th Psalm, where David for a time is almost tempted to despair of God's forgiveness, after saying, "Will the Lord absent himself for ever? and will he be no more entreated? Is his mercy clean gone for ever?" he adds, "hath God forgotten to be gracious?" To pray then that God will be gracious to his people, is to pray that he will listen to your supplications, and grant your requests, that he will be slow to mark what you have done amiss, and ready to take you into favour, when you forsake your sins, and cry to him for pardon.

The next blessing wished for you in the text is, "The Lord lift up his countenance upon you!" that is, the Lord shew forth his favour and love toward you. We may suppose this expression taken from a king sitting on his throne, and looking with eyes of such goodwill on the petitioners who come before him, that the by-standers perceive, and the petitioners themselves feel, that he is their friend: they feel that they have the happiness of being esteemed and loved by him, and that they can reckon with certainty on his protection. To be countenanced thus by the King of kings, to feel that he lets us freely into his presence, to

know that we have found favour in his sight, and that he has held out his golden sceptre to us, as King Ahasuerus held his sceptre out to Esther, when she presented herself before him,—this assuredly is the highest privilege a son of Adam can enjoy. It is true, God does not really sit, like an eastern king, on a visible throne: for he dwells in glory unapproachable, and in light which no eye can pierce. Nor does he really lift up his head, or hold out a golden sceptre. But a child may understand, that, when such things are said of God, it is for the purpose of bringing what is declared concerning him to the level of our poor weak minds. Were heavenly things spoken of after a heavenly manner, how could we creeping earth-worms lift up our thoughts to conceive them? Therefore it has pleased God in Holy Writ to speak of himself in words and images borrowed from earthly things, that so we may form some notions, however dim, and gain some knowledge, however scanty, of his infinite power and goodness. Thus in some places of Scripture God is called a king, in others a father. Not that he is like an earthly king, or an earthly father. But we all know what a king is, and what a father is: therefore, in compassion to our ignorance, God suffers himself to be thus spoken of, that we may in some measure understand what duty and obedience and

love we owe to him, and what protection and blessings and mercy we may hope for from him. So again we read in Scripture of God's hands, and God's eyes. Not that God, who is a spirit, has hands and eyes, as we have: but this is said, to warn us that he sees and knows our most secret actions, just as if he had eyes to see them with, and that he can punish us for our sins, and smite us down, just as if he had a strong right hand. You must not be surprised therefore by the expressions, "The Lord make his face shine upon thee," and "lift up his countenance upon thee." For these things too are said in compassion to our weakness, to teach us that God's favour is as cheering to the soul as sunshine to the body; and that they who are reconciled to him, and are living in his love, have the same quiet trust that no harm can happen to them, as you and I should have, if we knew ourselves to be countenanced and befriended by the king. If we had the king's countenance, if he had looked favorably upon us, and assured us of his friendship, we should expect to receive some honour or preferment; or at least we should feel certain that, so far as he could hinder, he would not suffer any one to hurt us. So is it with those who have God's countenance, but in a far, far higher degree. For the king, great as he is, is only a man. His power is cut short in a

thousand ways, and at the best can only follow us to the grave. When dust to dust is thrown upon our coffins, we are beyond the sway of every earthly prince. But God is the King of kings: his power has no bounds, except his own wisdom and goodness and will: whatever he pleases to do, he can do: above all, in the grave, where human rule is at an end, his rule and sovereignty are doubled. Here he leaves us in great measure to our own devices: he governs us by human means: he rules us by viceroys and stewards. But the moment the soul leaves the body, it passes into his immediate kingdom: it goes to a place where the government is given in charge, not to any earthly prince, but to the only begotten Son; who there reigns and judges in person with a boundless power to punish and to reward. My brethren, the friendship and protection of the King of kings is surely well worth having. May he vouchsafe, as the Psalmist expresses it, to "give us everlasting felicity, and to make us glad with the joy of his countenance!" (Psalm xxi. 6.)

Since God however does not really sit like a king upon a throne, nor shew himself to man face to face, how are we to know whether his countenance has been lifted upon us? The last blessing mentioned in the text will furnish an answer to this question: "The Lord give thee peace!"

For peace is the fruit of God's favour. He who is at peace, and feels himself at peace with God, he who knows himself to be reconciled to his heavenly Father through the sufferings and merits of Jesus Christ, he who knows that he has been admitted and adopted into Christ's family, and feels that obedient reverence and love toward God, which every true son must feel for the best of fathers,—such a person may be quite sure that God has indeed lifted up his countenance upon him. "The effect of righteousness," in both senses of the word,—the effect of justification by faith in the blood of Christ, and of our thereupon living a good and christian life, both of which things in Scripture are often termed righteousness,—the effect of this righteousness, the prophet Isaiah says, "is peace." If we know we are forgiven for Christ's sake, we are at peace; because we know that nothing can hurt us. If, out of gratitude and love to our Master and Saviour, we are living in obedience to his holy laws, then too we have every ground and reason to be at peace: for, "If we are followers of that which is good, who is he that will harm us?" (1 Peter iii. 13.)

Here I should conclude, but for one caution most needful to be given. Some may think, that, because they are at peace, because their conscience does not prick or pain them, therefore all must be

well with them. My brethren, it is not every sort of peace that is to be desired, but only that true peace, which is the effect of righteousness. There is a false peace, a peace arising out of recklessness and carelessness and the never thinking about God. Let me warn you against this false peace. Would you say that a man was at peace, who was dropping into a deadly slumber? Would you say that Samson was at peace, when he lay sleeping in the lap of Delilah? Such, so dangerous, so deadly is,—the peace shall I call it? or rather, the false security of the self-righteous and the careless.

Rouse yourselves, I beseech you, from such fatal slumbers, if any of you have hitherto been sinking beneath them. Awake! the flames of the fiery lake are flashing in your eyes; and you see them not, but are sliding sleep-bound toward them. Awake! behold, the face of the Lord does not shine, but frown upon you. Any fear, any woe, any sting of conscience, will be a blessing to you, which can save you from the wrath of a disregarded and offended God. As the old year has fallen into its grave, and the new year has just opened its eyes to the light of this morning's sun, so let the days of your ungodliness have come to an end, and let this be the first day of a new year of godly fear and hope. This is my prayer for you:

this is my new year's blessing. I cannot wish you peace yet. Your false dead peace must be broken up; the crust of ice which covers your hearts must be broken up; before the waters can flow gently and calmly, brightened by the sunshine of heaven.

My brethren, you can now understand a little better, how precious was the blessing which the priest of God among the Jews called down upon the people of God. Let me repeat the words again, as I do from my heart: my brethren, the Lord bless you this year, and keep you! the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, now and evermore!

SERMON II.

GRACE, PEACE, AND KNOWLEDGE.

2 Peter i. 2.

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

Of the twenty-one epistles handed down to us in the New Testament, nineteen,—all but two,—open with a prayer for the spiritual well-being of the persons to whom they are addrest. Before the apostles enter on their task of exhortation and instruction, they begin by wishing their brethren in Christ the choicest spiritual blessings; and in sixteen of the epistles these blessings are grace and peace. Grace and peace then must be something very precious, seeing that they were the thoughts thus uppermost in the minds of the apostles, the very first thoughts to strike them when they sat down to write, and among the first words to drop from their pen. And precious, most precious

blessings indeed they are, my brethren. For what do they amount to? what is the meaning of these two holy, apostolical words? To begin with the first: grace means favour. To shew grace is to shew favour. To be in a person's good graces is to be in favour with him. An act of grace is an act of favour, of that favour which springs from mercy and love, and which gives or forgives a man more than in justice he has any right to look for. Thus we read that "Joseph found grace (that is, found favour) in the sight of Potiphar." But in the New Testament grace is hardly ever used except in speaking of God, and the things of God: and it either means the favour and mercy and love of God, or some gift bestowed on man by that favour and mercy and love: above all, that greatest and most precious of all gifts, the gift of his only-begotten Son, the forgiveness of our sins purchast for us by his blood, and the promise of eternal life, if we will turn to him, and believe in him, and obey him. This too is more especially called the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, with a petition for which, you know, the minister winds up the service. In the text we may perhaps give the word a somewhat wider sense, and take it to stand generally for God's love and favour towards all the true followers of Christ.

Moreover, as grace in the text is the grace and

favour of God, so peace in the text is that inward spiritual peace, which springs out of God's grace and favour, and which is the greatest of all the blessings it is possible for man to enjoy. Not that peace of other kinds is to be slighted. Peace from foreign enemies, peace from strife and broils in our own land, peace and harmony among neighbours, peace and love in a family,—all these things are blessings to be thankful for, when we have them, and to be prayed for, when we have them not. Again, peace in the Church would be another great blessing: and this too is to be prayed for, that it may please God to heal those divisions and quarrels among Christians, sect against sect, and party against party, which give rise to so much scandal, and are such a handle to the profane. "We see (say they) that even those who take the most thought about religion, cannot be of one mind in it: why then should we set foot in a road where there is so much jangling and jostling?" Thus talk, and thus think the profane. And doubtless, could peace and unity be restored to the Church of Christ, were the day to come when "Ephraim shall no more envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim" (Isaiah xi. 13), could the world see the great and glorious sight of Christians holding the same faith, agreeing in the same

doctrines, joining in the same worship, and walking along the same path in peace and love, as brethren and partners in one hope ought to do,—doubtless such a living proof of the peacefulness and excellency of Christ's kingdom would bring in many to the truth, who at present have deserted its banner, and enlisted on the side of its enemies. But, though peace in the Church, and all other outward peace, is a great blessing, and though the peace which St Peter desires to see multiplied amongst us, would turn the whole earth into a garden for every kind of peace to flourish in, still it is clear that the peace he has mainly in view, is the spiritual peace which arises out of the favour of God. For so grace and peace stand naturally together; and peace follows grace, and flows from it, and grows out of it, as a stream flows from a spring, and as a blossom grows from a tree. Both too come to us "through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord."

Peace, I say, inward peace, peace of mind, peace of conscience, flows and grows out of God's grace: and this is the only source, the only root, from which it can spring. For think a little: how should we stand toward God, supposing Christ had never come into the world? or supposing that, now he is come, he had nót reconciled us to the Father?

God is almighty, and can deal with us according to his will: he has given us just and holy laws: and those laws we have broken again and again in every possible way. There is no man living so good as he ought to be: there is no man living so good as he might well have been, considering his opportunities and advantages: there is no man living who has not done wrong, wrong in the face and against the law of God, when he might, had he pleased, have done right; no man who has not done what at the time he well knew to be wrong, and who has not failed in doing what he knew he ought to have done. How then can any man, whose heart has ever warned him, or who has ever been warned of these things,—how can such a man be at peace? When Jehu was asked by the king of Israel, "Is it peace, Jehu?" he answered, "What peace, so long as the idolatries of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" (2 Kings ix. 22.) In like manner when a person, who has been awakened to a sense of his duty and of his sins, says to his conscience, "Is it peace, Conscience?" his conscience makes answer, "What peace, thou sinner? when the witchcrafts of that Jezebel within thee, that carnal heart of thine, and its abominations and idolatries are so many; when thou hast preferred the world, and the things of the world, the flesh, and the things of the flesh,—

nay, when thou hast even preferred those hell-sprung passions, envy, and hatred, and malice, and revenge, to the law of God; when thou hast made an idol of thyself, and set up thine own will to be the rule and principle of thy thoughts and actions,—having lived thus, O sinner, what room can there be for peace?" Such must be, such has ever been, the answer of the conscience, when men come to it in search of that inward peace, which always shrinks and flees from every kind of guilt, whether great or small.

But if a man's conscience will not allow him to have peace, whither shall he betake himself to find it? Shall he go to his natural reason, to that reason by which the affairs of mankind in this world are ordered and controlled? That will tell him, that, according to the laws of man, every offense has its set punishment. It is no excuse for a person who has broken any one law, that he has kept fifty others. When a man is tried for a robbery, it is of no avail for him to plead that he has never murdered anybody; nor, if he is tried for stealing, that he is not a highway-robber; nor, if he is tried for a riot, that he is not a thief; nor, if he is tried for poaching, that he is not a rioter. A man is bound to keep all the laws. If he breaks any one of them, and is found out, he may be brought to punishment: nay, he is sure of meeting

with it, unless from something out of the common way, such as his youth, or the pettiness of the injury, or its being a first offense, he is lucky enough to get a pardon. But can any one say, he never offended God, except when he was very young and knew no better? Can any one say, he has offended God only once, and in some small matter? If there be such a person, natural reason might perhaps encourage him to look for pardon at God's hands. But we all know, there is no such person in the world, nor ever was. We all know, if we know anything about the matter, that in many ways, and at every season of life, in childhood, in boyhood, in youth, in manhood, in old age, all have offended, and all are still offending God; some of us more indeed, and some less, but all frequently, and all grievously and inexcusably. We know that every man has broken God's law, knowingly and wilfully, over and over again. That law too is a perfect law: and the lawgiver is one whom there is no deceiving or escaping. What peace then can reason bestow? Its sentence must be, Thou hast broken the law; therefore thou must abide the penalty of the law.

But perhaps some one, after being thus baffled by his conscience and his reason, may think of turning to the Old Testament, to see whether he can find comfort there. Well! what does he read?

He reads, "Cursed is every one that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." (Deut. xxvii. 26.) So that we must do them all: else we are accursed. If we do not keep them all, if we sin against them, then we read this plain sentence, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. xviii. 20.)

Here then we have the sinner, when he becomes aware of his guilt,—and when I say the sinner, I mean you, I mean all, for all are sinners,—going for hope, for comfort, for peace, to conscience and reason: but he gets no hope, or comfort, or peace from them. Conscience tells him, "I have no peace to give thee, because I know thee to be a sinner." Reason tells him, "I have no peace to give thee, because thou hast broken the law; and he who breaketh the law, shall be broken by the law." And if, in the hope of getting a milder answer, he takes up the Old Testament, he there finds many offers of pardon, it is true, and many promises of mercy; but he also finds the most terrible threats against every kind of iniquity: he finds story after story of God's fearful judgements against sinners: above all, he finds a covenant of works too perfect for man to keep: and he reads those words so appalling to a sinner, who is seeking after peace; "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." How then is he to find peace? He cannot find.

it for himself: nothing on earth can give it him; he must receive it therefore from above: it must come to him as a free gift from God. That is, it must come to him by grace. If God is graciously pleased to offer us his free pardon, and to take us back into his favour, then, and then alone, can we have peace.

Now this way to peace has been opened to us by God's free mercy and grace. When we were yet afar off, nay, before we had ever thought of turning to him, while we were loitering in the fields, among the swine, feeding on the husks of sin and folly, God himself, in the person of his only Son, came to us, to look for us, and to fetch us home again, and brought us the angel food of truth and holiness, that, having tasted thereof, we might loathe the wretched fare we had till then been feeding on. By this shewing forth of God's great love for us, by this proof that he wishes us to be reconciled to him, by this precious pledge that he longs to pardon us, if we will only let him, the sinner is enabled to find peace. The moment we are sure of being forgiven, our spirits may throw aside their griefs, and fly back to God, and find rest in a humble trust in his mercy; seeing that we may now have a good and certain hope, that God will no leave his work imperfect; that he, who has begun our salvation, will carry it on to

the end; that he, who has given us his only Son to die for us, will with him freely give us all things, which make for the good of our souls. Thus, as an excellent old writer says, "the flower of peace grows upon the root of grace."*

"This persuasion," he continues, "has such a gentle power with it, that it can make our minds clear and bright, like the finest day in summer. 'My peace I give to you,' says Christ, 'let not your hearts be troubled.' All the peace and favour of the world cannot calm a troubled heart; but where this peace is, which Christ gives, all the trouble and disquiet of this world cannot disturb it."† Have any of you happened to see the effect of a breeze on a pool of deep water in a sheltered valley? The wind may be sharp enough to ruffle the face of the water for a while; but its depths are at peace. So is it with the Christian. The cares and worries of life cannot pierce below the surface of his spirit: for he is lying beneath the shelter of his Saviour; and so the depths of his heart are safe from every common trouble and annoyance. Nothing earthly can shake his soul, unless it be one of those heavy storms and whirlwinds of affliction, with which it sometimes pleases God to try the patience of his servants. But God never tasks his children beyond their power; so

* Leighton, vol. i. p. 28. † p. 30.

that, when he tries them with some heart-searching grief, he at the same time sends them strength to bear it. Apart however from these heavy heart-searching woes, which befall us, God be praised, very rarely, the Christian enjoys great peace. To a mind like his, a mind at ease in itself, and feeding on the promises of its God and Saviour, what matter those outward grievances and distresses, which harass and trouble the children of this world? Truly they are little more to him, than the rattling of the hail on the tiles to a man sitting by a good fire with a plentiful meal before him.* If the man takes notice of the storm out of doors, it is only to say how glad he is to be out of it. So, if the Christian notices those cares and crosses, which his worldly neighbours make so much of, it is only to thank God for having called him to a covert from the gales of life, and placed him in a safe and sheltered haven.

What then makes so many people take up such a dislike to religion, as if it were a sour and unpleasant thing? It is because they see the temperance and the self-denial of the true Christian: they see that he shrinks from every kind of revelry and excess: they see that his very mirth has something quiet and sober in it: and seeing all this, they say within themselves, "What a poor dull

* Leighton, vol. i. p. 30.

wretched fellow this must be! I would not be like him for the world." This is strange language, is it not? for anybody to hold about a Christian. For every thinking man must know that a true Christian is the child and heir of God. A true Christian is approved by the Father; a true Christian is loved by the Son; a true Christian has been sanctified by the Holy Ghost; hereafter he will be the companion of angels; and even now his heart is more than half in heaven. For a sinner to speak scornfully of such a person, for a sinner to say of God's servant and child, "I would not be like him for the world,"—is surely very strange and foolish talk. Yet how often do we hear such talk! How often do we see the sinner, perched on the dunghill of his vices, clapping his wings in self-applause, and fancying himself a much grander creature than the poor Christian, who all the while is soaring on high like a lark, and mounting on his way to heaven! Foolish however, and worse than foolish as it is, for sinners to despise a Christian, it is not altogether to be wondered at that they should sometimes think his lot dull and wretched. For they can only judge by the outside: they cannot look within: they cannot see the inward joy, the gladness of heart, which the true Christian is seldom without, even when in a very hard and low estate. The sinner cannot see this: nor, if he

could, would he be able to fathom it, or make it out; for it is a peace which passeth this world's understanding. Yet it is not a whit the less real, or less delightful; nor does it less fill the heart.

If any of you then have a longing for peace, and put belief in what the Bible tells you, be persuaded to look for peace in the quarter to which I have been pointing you. Make the attempt: it can do you no harm. Give religion a fair trial. Seek for peace in the way of grace, in the way of reconciliation with the Father, in the way of God's love and favour, in the way, the spiritual way, of piety, and meekness, and obedience. This is the true and straight road to peace and happiness; and beside it there is no other. Every other road will end in disappointment. This will lead you to the only happiness which can give a man peace at the last.

But perhaps you may ask me how I know there is no other road to happiness, beside this way of peace. I know it for two reasons: first from the nature of the thing; because nothing short of God can satisfy an immortal soul; and, so long as the soul is unsatisfied, a man cannot be more than half happy. Moreover the wisest man that ever lived, Solomon, has told us so. He made the trial. He sought for happiness in a thousand ways, and has left us his record that he found them all to be

vanity, and vexation of spirit. Now, if he, with every luxury, every enjoyment, every indulgence, which gold could buy,—if Solomon, with all his power, all his wisdom, all his glory, all his splendour, all his riches,—if he found life, when away from God, such a poor, vexatious, empty thing, what shall we find it? we, whose utmost worldly pleasures can no more be compared to his, than a cup of muddy ditch-water can be compared to the richest wine. If you wish for happiness then, look for it in the only road that has ever led to it. Seek for God's grace, for God's forgiveness, for God's favour; pray for them; let them into your souls; and when they have come, and taken up their abode with you, peace will not long be a stranger. It will come to you, and make you happy.

Such, my brethren, is the peace which the apostle desires for you in the text. It is a spiritual peace, arising from a sense of God's great favour and mercy. It is an inward peace, shedding balm over the soul, and preserving it from being galled and fretted by the petty rubs of life. But we shall form a faint notion of the apostle's love and christian kindness, unless we consider the measure and degree of his good wishes. It is not enough for him to wish us grace and peace: he prays that the grace and peace may be multiplied. This is in-

deed blessing us with a good measure of blessings, pressed down, and running over. "Grace and peace be multiplied." Had he been speaking of any earthly blessing, he would have written differently. He would never have wished you to have riches without stint, or power without stint, or honours without stint. On the contrary he would have told you, that an abundance of any of these things is the most dangerous trial a man can be put to. Accordingly the wise Agur, in praying against poverty, takes care to pray also against riches. "Give me not riches," he says, "lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" (Prov. xxx. 9.) But in spiritual blessings it is otherwise. Of them there can never be too much. A man can never have too much faith, too much holiness, too much trust in God, too much love for Christ, too much patience, too much humility. Therefore, in speaking of those heavenly blessings, grace and peace, the apostle desires them for us without any stint or limit, saying, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you." Hence me may take a lesson for our own prayers, and learn to ask for earthly things humbly, and with an *if*,—saying, "If it shall please thee, O God, of thy goodness give me so and so. Thou knowest, O Lord, what is best for thy servant, grant me so and so, if it be good for me." This is the way we ought to

pray for earthly blessings: for so prayed even Jesus himself. Even he, when crying to the Father, during that agony of his spirit in the garden of Gethsemane, even Jesus, prayed with an *if*,—saying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." Let us follow our Lord's example in this; and when we pray for any earthly blessings, beyond the mere necessaries of life, let us ask for them humbly, and with an *if;* like persons aware of our own ignorance, and who feel that no one can tell what is truly good for a man in this life. But for heavenly blessings pray without an *if*. For about them we do know most certainly, that the more we can get of them the better. Therefore ask for them earnestly and repeatedly. Be not afraid of wearying God by your entreaties. Beg and pray to him for his pardon, for his love, for the help of his Holy Spirit, like men who long to have what they ask for. Beg and pray to him again and again, that his grace and peace may be multiplied and increast to you, without stint, and without measure. Perhaps your petitions may not be granted the first time, nor the tenth time, nor even the hundredth time. Never mind; pray on the more earnestly, remembering our Saviour's words, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force;" (Matt. xi.

12;) that is to say, you may pull down the blessings of the gospel by constant and hearty prayer. St Paul too bids us "desire spiritual gifts." (1 Cor. xiv. 1.) Be desirous, then, nay, be covetous, be greedy of them. It is the only kind of covetousness and greediness, which is praiseworthy, and which is sure to be satisfied in the end. "The lions," we read, that is, those who are like lions, those who are greedy of any kind of earthly prey, "do lack and suffer hunger:" (Ps. xxxiv. 10:) the more they get, the more they crave; so that they are never satisfied, and never can be. But those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, and grace, and peace, and the other gifts of God and Christ, they are declared by our Saviour to be "blessed, for they shall be filled." Their wishes will be granted; and they will want none of those good things for which they have cried to their Father.

Such is the measure of the grace and peace which the apostle desires for us. He would have them multiplied and increast to us. But how is this increase and multiplying to come to us? It is to come through "the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." If you wish to receive the multiplied grace and peace, which I have shewn you to be so precious, you must seek it through the appointed channel; you must seek it through

knowledge, through a spiritual knowledge, through a living knowledge, of God the Father and the Son. There is a knowledge which, St Paul tells us, "puffs a man up, and fills him with a vain conceit" of being wiser than his neighbours. This however can never be the knowledge, through which grace and peace are to be multiplied. For instance, a man might be able to say by heart all the names in the Bible, all the names of the kings of Israel, all the names of the kings of Judah, all the names of the heads of the families that returned with Nehemiah from Babylon. Yet this knowledge would profit him nothing. It is only a knowledge of the names of men; whereas St Peter requires a knowledge of God and of his Son. Again, a man might be able to tell the number of verses in every chapter all the Bible through; and he might be able to say the first word of every chapter, or even the first word of every verse. Would that knowledge profit him? No. It would only be a knowledge of words and numbers: it would not be a knowledge of God and of his Son. Or a man might be able to explain all the hard words, and to tell the meaning of all the hardest texts in the Bible; and this too, if he knew nothing besides about the Bible, would profit him nothing. It would only be a knowledge of difficulties; it would not be a knowledge of God and of his Son.

The knowledge which St Peter recommends to us in the text, is not a knowledge of words, or names, or numbers; it is not a knowledge of what is curious, or learned, or difficult; but a practical and enlightened knowledge of the truths set before us in the gospel.

It must be a practical knowledge: because religion is in great measure a practical thing; and practical things are learnt by practice. A man who would learn religion thoroughly, must go through an apprenticeship to it, just as he would to a trade. "If any man will do God's will," said our blessed Lord, "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." (John vii. 17.) To the same purpose are David's words: "Come, taste and see how gracious the Lord is!" (Ps. xxxiv. 8.) The best way of seeing and perceiving the grace of God is to begin by tasting it. This assuredly is the best knowledge that any body can have of God. He who enjoys this precious knowledge, has the proof of the gospel in himself. For to him Jesus fulfills the promise, which he made the night before his crucifixion: "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." (John xiv. 23.)

Still, beside this practical knowledge, every one, poor as well as rich, ought also to have an enlight-

ened knowledge of God and of his blessed Son: and Jesus, when he brought down the gospel from heaven, purposed that so it should be. The gospel was meant to be a light to the mind of every one, as well as a strength and comfort to the heart of every one. If Christian education had been duly established in this country, so it would be. I am afraid in this we are gone backward,—not indeed since our fathers time,—for teaching the poor is more attended to now, than it was some years ago; but I fear we have gone backward in this matter since the time of our glorious Reformation; and we are only beginning to recover our lost ground. Our forefathers carried on the education of the poor by frequent and diligent catechizing; that is, by questioning them over and over about the great truths and facts and doctrines of Christianity. But now that preaching is looked upon as the great thing in every church, this catechizing or questioning has in many places fallen into disuse; and I think the poor have lost by the change. To profit by a sermon, a man must attend to it: he must hear it thoroughly; he must understand it; he must think it over with himself, when he gets home. How few in any congregation will go to all this trouble! You come, and sit, and hear, and I hope are able in some degree to follow the meaning of what I say to you from

the pulpit: yet how far is this from the understanding and the knowledge by which grace and peace are to be multiplied! But when a person is catechized, when he is asked questions, and called on to answer them, he must think; he must brace up his mind: unless he is determined not to learn, he can scarce help being taught something. And those who want to learn, those who feel a wish to improve, and to grow in the knowledge of their Lord and Master,—what progress must they make under such instruction! When I speak thus of catechizing, do not think I mean to decry preaching. Both are useful in their turns, catechizing to prepare the ground, preaching to crop it. But unless the mind be prepared by catechizing, preaching loses half its use.

Thinking as I do of this practice of catechizing, you will not be surprised that I am very anxious the young among you should not neglect the opportunity of instruction, with which I purpose to furnish them this winter. It would be a shame, if, in so small a parish, I could not contrive means for teaching those who are willing to be taught. In great town parishes, where there are sometimes thousands of souls, a minister, with the best wishes for the welfare of his people, cannot find time to do all he wishes: what is he among so many? But here, where we all live so

close together,—here, where one small hamlet,—it is hardly more,—contains all the people under my care, if the poor are not duly trained and brought up in the knowledge of God and of his Son, blame and guilt must needs lie somewhere. God grant it lie not with me! God grant it be not said to me in the last day, "Here is a soul that was committed to your charge: it might have been saved by your watchfulness: you neglected it; and it is lost." But if this would to me be a most sorrowful hearing, so as to embitter, if it were possible, the very joys of heaven, how must it steep the soul in misery on that dreadful day, for one of you to hear, "You have no excuse to plead: you had every opportunity of instruction; and you would not learn; you would not hear: your obstinacy and heedlessness have ruined your soul!"

For there is only one way of attaining to the enlightened knowledge I spoke of. By going to the light. God has given us his word to be a lantern to our feet, and a light to our paths. Go then to that blessed light. Take your Bible, and study it carefully; and it will teach you all that you have so much need to know both about the Father and the Son. Happily this great and good light, which God has given us in his book, is set within the reach of many more persons now,

than it was forty years back. Bibles and Testaments are now so cheap, that a few pence will buy a New Testament; and Sunday-schools and other schools are so common, that almost every child may learn to read, who will. Here we have the light of God's holy word placed within the reach of every one. Is not this a great and glorious privilege? a privilege to be heartily thankful for? If it is, shew your thankfulness to God for this great gift, by making a good use of it. Some of the older persons among you perhaps have never learnt to read: if so, they can best tell what a sad loss it is, to be unable to read with one's own eyes the wonderful works of God in Christ. Do I say this to discourage these poor unlettered persons? Not so: but to remind them that, if one way of improving their knowledge of Christ, the way of reading, is closed to them, another way is still open, the way of hearing. Let them be the more careful then to learn in that way, since they can learn in no other: and for their comfort, let them remember the apostle's words, "Faith cometh by hearing." (Rom. x. 17.) In former times, when books were scarce, faith came to the poor in the way of hearing only. In our days it has pleased God to open wider than before a second way to the knowledge of his will, the way of reading. Still there are

elderly persons who cannot read; and these should beware of neglecting any opportunity of coming to this place, to hear the word of God.

But children are without excuse, if they do not learn to read, as well as hear. Yes, children, you must learn to read the word of God. When you go to school, above all, when you come to your Sunday-school, do not come as to a task; but come with hearts full of thankfulness to God, for giving you such means of learning the way to heaven. Come with a wish to learn all you can about God and his blessed Son. Do not think it enough, if you learn to spell, and to read, and to say the words of Scripture: but seek to learn the truths of Scripture. Do as the bees do. A bee, when it sees a flower, does not fly round and round it, and sip it, and then off again, like the foolish idle butterflies: it settles on the flower, and sucks the honey out of it. So should you, when you come to one of the beautiful parables which Jesus spake, or to one of the miracles which Jesus did: you should do as the bees do: you should settle your thoughts on what you read, and try to suck the honey out of it. But why do I speak of the parables and miracles? Almost every verse of the New Testament has its honey. Almost every verse contains a spiritual truth fit to nourish some soul or other.

Almost every verse of the New Testament, I say, contains a spiritual truth fit to nourish some soul or other. For though every man has equal need to be nourished by the Bible, yet we do not all require the same spiritual food: nay, we may require one kind of spiritual food to-day, and another kind next year. The old have not the same temptations as the young: the rich have not the same sort of temptations as the poor: the prosperous and happy have not the same sort of temptations as the sorrowful. But every age, every rank, every condition of life, has its own trials, and its own temptations; and perhaps these temptations may not be the same a couple of weeks together. For this reason the Bible is not a book to be read through once or twice, and then laid by: it must be read and thought upon again and again. The oftener you go to it for counsel and nourishment, the better, the wiser, the stronger, the happier you will become. Go to it then in youth, for such nourishment as youth needs: go to it in manhood and old age, for such nourishment as manhood and old age need. Let me rather say, go to it for your daily bread. Seek in it whatever may be necessary for the present nourishment of your souls: and pray to the Holy Spirit to open your eyes, that you may find that nourishment. And when you have found it, still do as the bees

do; hive it; store it up in your memories against the day of trial. Remember, it was by the truths of Scripture, which he had stored up in his memory during youth, that our Saviour himself, when he was tempted in the wilderness, was pleased to baffle the wiles of the devil. If we would beat off Satan, as Jesus did, we must use the same weapon as Jesus used: we must oppose him with the word of God. That word, like the spears which the ancients used to fight with, is at once a weapon and a prop: it has a point to drive away the enemy; it has a staff to support us on our road. Lean on that staff, which is the promises of God: it shall support you, when your heart is ready to sink. Fight with that point, which is the sharp commands of God: and the tempter shall flee before you. So walking, and so fighting, not in your own strength, but in humble reliance upon that Almighty Lord, whose word standeth fast for ever, you shall attain to that knowledge of the Father and the Son, which St Peter speaks of in the text. You shall see the Father as he is in himself, pure, and severe, and holy; as he is in his Son, loving, merciful, and forgiving; the man Jesus, patient and obedient,—the incarnate Son, humbling himself out of the purest love,—the same Son, sitting on his Father's judgement-seat, the punisher of all who have shut their hearts

against his mercy. This is the knowledge which leads to grace and peace. In proportion as you come to see the Father and his Christ in these their true and heavenly characters, you will grow to feel God's goodness more and more: you will learn to hate sin more and more: you will learn to love God's law, to be meek and spiritually-minded; and these things lead to great peace; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

SERMON III.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

2 PETER iii. 18.

Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THESE are the concluding words of the second epistle general of St Peter. They contain the last advice which that apostle has left to the Church of Christ. For his epistle is not addrest to any particular Church, or to the Christians of any particular age. It is a general epistle to all who have been called to share in the great and precious promises of the gospel. What is said in it, is said to all Christian people, and of course to us among the number. Let us look then on the text, as the parting exhortation bequeathed by St Peter to us. Let us consider him as saying to us personally, Grow in grace and spiritual knowledge. Do not sit down satisfied with your present pro-

gress in religion. Do not fancy you have already attained to that holiness and righteousness which ought to be the mark of Christians. Beware of slumbering or halting on the road. Beware of mistaking words and professions for Christian faith, a decent behaviour for Christian practice, the outward form for the inward spirit. It is not enough for Christ's soldiers to stand their ground, and maintain their stedfastness: they must press forward and gain more ground. It is not enough for them not to fall from grace: they must make new shoots upward, and grow in grace; and this can only be done by growing in religious knowledge also.

Such, my brethren, is the purport of St Peter's farewell charge to us: and surely the last words of so great an apostle must be well deserving of our most serious attention. Let me beg you therefore to give me that attention, while I try to set before you what is meant by growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The grace of God, in its most general sense, stands for his favour and loving-kindness. When we pray for it, we pray God to bestow his favour upon us. But in the New Testament the words are applied more especially to that most wonderful and chiefest instance of God's love, his seeking to save and restore a guilty world through the blood of his Son. Herein, above all, was the grace

and goodness of God displayed to us in its whole fulness,—in that, when we had strayed from God, God sent his own Son to lead us back to him,—in that, when expiation and atonement for sin were required by his justice and holiness, the Lamb of God came and offered up himself as a sacrifice in our stead,—in that, to give us a new heart, a heart capable of loving and obeying the Father, the holy and eternal Spirit is waiting to take up his abode within us, to fill our souls with the comfort of his presence, and to make our very bodies his temples. These, my brethren, are the blessings which God is holding out to you, and to me, and to every one who is called by the name of Christ. He invites you to them, as to a rich feast, in that noble passage of Isaiah (lv. 1): "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." No invitation can be more bountiful, or more pressing: none therefore can be more gracious. It has the grace of condescension, for the Sovereign of the universe to abase himself so as to invite, and even to entreat his creatures, as he does in many passages of Scripture, where he almost forces them to come in and see the dainties he has prepared for them. It has the grace of bounteousness, to make ready so nourishing and rich a ban-

quet for all who will be at the pains of going to it. To this we must add that most necessary and precious gift, or favour, or grace, (for the name does not matter, so you understand the thing,) the grace of mercy. When a king grants a pardon to his rebellious subjects, it is called an act of grace. Well then may the universal pardon which the King of heaven has freely offered to his rebellious subjects and children, if they will only come to him and accept it, well may a pardon joined with so much bounteousness and condescension be called preeminently the grace of God.

From this explanation of grace, it is easy to gather what the being in a state of grace means, and also to perceive when it may be truly said of any one, that he is in such a state. To be in a state of grace is to be at peace with God. It is to have come in and surrendered ourselves, as it were, and confest our guilt; and having acknowledged our rebellion, and thrown ourselves on his promised mercy, and pleaded the death and merits of his Son as our only ground of pardon, it is to shew our grateful sense of the forgiveness vouchsafed to us by living thenceforward as becomes the people of God. This is being in a state of grace. For though God's pardon is unbought and not to be bought by any human means, though they who buy it are to buy it without money and without

price, still it is not unconditional. He pardons all who come to receive their lives at his hand, but none else. If a man will not come to God, his sin and guilt cleave to him. When pardon is granted to a rebel, on his surrendering himself to the king's officers, and delivering up his arms, and promising to behave better, it stands to reason that the pardon will hold good only so long as the promise is kept. If the man breaks his word, and commits fresh outrages against the king's authority, his life is once more forfeit. This, which is true of earthly pardons, is equally true of heavenly. Every one who lives in sin, is living at enmity with God. He is living in rebellion against the ruler of the world; and so long as he continues in such rebellion, he is shut out by his own wilful obstinacy and perverseness from the free pardon which God has offered to mankind. It is impossible to be in a state of grace, so long as we abide in any known sin, whether of body or mind, whether of habit or passion, whether of society or selfishness. Of every sin, and every kind of sin, understand clearly, that the indulging in it is a bar which must shut you out from a state of grace. They who are in a state of grace, have at least set their faces toward the heavenly city: they have passed the strait gate, and have entered on the narrow way that leads to life.

It is not enough however for a person to be in a state of grace, unless he afterward persevere and grow in grace. Now what is meant by growth in grace? It means that the beginning of a journey is not the end of it. It means that we must advance in holiness, that, instead of resting on our oars, and priding ourselves on our present small attainments, we must press forward, giving all diligence, as St Peter expresses it in a former passage of this Epistle, that we may add to our faith virtue, or energy, and to energy knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness universal charity. Here is a goodly list of qualities wherein to cultivate growth in grace, and to go on all our lives advancing from grace to grace and from strength to strength.

But why does the apostle call it growth? Perhaps to remind us that the improvement he exhorts us to is not a mere mechanical task, which a man can begin and finish for himself; but that it is more like the gradual and secret workings of nature, where, though it is man's duty to dig and plough, and plant and sow, and weed and water, yet, after all is done, God alone giveth the increase; and unless he is pleased to bless the labours of the husbandman, they will have been

in vain. Be this the reason or no, certain it is that in many places of Scripture a godly life is compared to growth. Indeed the very word *life* would lead us to look for growth: for everything that lives grows or has grown.

This, which is true of the lives of animals and plants, is equally true of the lives of Christians. The beginning of a christian life, you know, is called regeneration, or the being born again. But a Christian is not born full-grown in grace, any more than in body. We can enter the kingdom of heaven only as little children; and from that smallness and weakness of spiritual childhood we are to rise by degrees to the fulness of stature which belongs to christian manhood. Now this great change and increase can only be brought about by the soul's growing in grace, just as the body grows in strength and size. Such growth is indeed most necessary to a christian life; seeing that, if we live on without it, a thing most shameful will befall us. We shall be old in years, and infants in holiness: infants, not in sinlessness,—for in sins we shall be old enough,—but infants in our want of strength, infants in our want of knowledge, infants in our want of self-controll, infants in our utter inability to walk straight, or to stand the least push of temptation. In all these things, if we do not grow in grace, we shall be no

better than a tottering child. Our spiritual life will want nerves and sinews: and so we shall draw down on ourselves the reproach of Reuben, —"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excell," (Gen. xlix. 4,) and like him shall forfeit our inheritance. Nay, unless we grow in grace, what shall we become in the end, but as it were so many spiritual dwarfs? Now what can be more unsightly? what can be more contrary to that beauty of holiness, which the Bible so often speaks of? Few things are so displeasing to the eyes of man, as a little stunted misshapen dwarf, who yet is only a dwarf in body: could you see a dwarf in soul however, had you spiritual eyes to perceive him with, you would all cry out that he is far more displeasing. The dwarf in body is an object not for mockery, but for pity; for his growth was not checked by any fault of his own: it is an affliction which God has sent him. But the dwarf, the hideous dwarf in soul might have been otherwise if he would. Strive then to grow in grace, and take care that ye be not dwarfs in soul. Let the seed of the word grow within you. Seed, you know, is of no value unless it spring up. So is it with the seed of truth: that too must spring up, and grow, and must bear fruit: or we shall never be able to pay God the rent due to him for the farm of life which he has let to us. You remember

how in the parable of the vineyard, when harvest came, the Lord sent a servant to the husbandman to receive his share of the fruit. But whence is the fruit to come, if there be no growth? In every point of view then, whether we look on ourselves as God's tenants, who owe him rent, or as babes in Christ, who would fain become perfect men,—in every way there must be growth.

But if growth in grace be thus necessary and important, how are we to know for certain whether we are so growing or not? We may know it by comparing the state of our souls at present, with what it was a twelvemonth ago. Is there any temptation which you have outgrown, and lost your relish for? as a man outgrows the games and sports of his childhood, and loses all relish for the playthings and the cakes which a few years back he was so fond of. Or is there any duty, which a twelvemonth ago was irksome to you, and which you have now learnt to practise, and gained a taste for? If you can answer these two questions satisfactorily, and find on examination that you have made what looks like an improvement, it remains for you in that case to ask yourselves, whether the improvement is a real one? Is it a cleansing of the outside of the platter only? or have you been scouring the inside also? I mean, the heart. Is it a growth in christian grace? or

merely a greater regard for common decency? While you fancy you have been improving, have you not peradventure been only changing one sin for another? This is a very important question: because many deceive themselves, to their own mischief, by fancying they are growing better, when in truth they are only growing older, and are laying aside the sinful intemperance and extravagance of youth, to take up in their stead the no less sinful harshness and worldly-mindedness of old age. In a word, the true question to be answered is, have you since this time twelvemonth been going forward on the road to heaven? or have you been going backward? Many will doubtless answer, we have been standing still. But in so saying you pass a judgement against yourselves, and confess that you have been going backward. For life is a stream; and he who does not work his way up it, is carried down. Throw a stick into a river: will it stand still? Because, with so many temptations, and so many evil customs, setting down the stream against you, no more will you stand still, if you give way lazily to the current. It will bear you before it, slowly perhaps, but surely; just as a river, however sluggish, is sure to carry down the stick. Some motion there must be one way or other: if you do not move toward God, you will be moved away from him.

Growth there must be one way or other: if you do not grow upward, you will grow downward: if you do not rise up straight like a poplar, you will become as crooked and full of knots as an old crab, which is good for nothing but to be cut down and burnt.

There is another test and sign of growth in grace, which I will mention; an increast use of the means of grace, and an increast and increasing delight and relish in using them. Do you come to church oftener than you did? While here, do you attend more to the prayers, and try more to join in them? Do you listen more than you did formerly to the sermon, and apply it to yourself as a glass to see your own sins with? Do you pray oftener when you are alone? Do you take more delight in prayer? and when you pray, do you find that you think more about what you are asking from God, that you care more about it, that you wish for it more, than you did some time back? Do you take up your Bible oftener, and enjoy reading it more, and find you understand it better? Do you feel a greater desire to partake in the blessed Sacrament, and a greater comfort when you have taken it? These are among the surest signs of growth in grace: and he who finds them in himself, may cheer himself with the thought that he is truly increasing, not in grace

alone, but also in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For in this too does the apostle in the text exhort us to grow. Not in mere head-knowledge: this of itself is worth nothing. "If ye know these things, (says our Saviour,) happy are ye if ye do them." He does not say, that we are happy if we know them. That by itself can never make us, can never make any one, happy. On the contrary, his words imply, that, if we know them, and do them not, we shall not be happy, but most wretched. Though knowledge however, apart from practice, is worth nothing, yet knowledge of Christ and of his will, as guiding to practice, is most excellent. Nor is it merely excellent: it is necessary. For though we may know, and not do, yet, unless we know, how shall we do? How can men believe in him of whom they have not heard? Faith must come either by hearing the word of God, or by reading it. Without this, be it reading or be it hearing, without some instruction, without some knowledge of Jesus Christ, there can be no entrance into a state of grace. Religious knowledge being then in a mannner the key of grace, must needs be necessary to all who desire to enter it. Indeed, if you think a little, you will see that knowledge, and nothing else, is at bottom the difference between you and the heathens. They have never

heard of Christ; you have: therefore they do not believe in him; and you profess that you do. Had they been bred in a christian country, had they been brought to church from their early years, and sent to school, and had the same advantages which people enjoy here in England, they too would have been called Christians, just as we are. Judge then, whether it be not your duty to increase in religious knowledge as much as possible, that you may not be almost but altogether Christians. Judge, whether it does not behove you to prize the lamp thus entrusted to you; not allowing it to get dim or smoky through neglect, or to go out for want of oil, but ever trimming it, and rubbing it, keeping the glass quite clear, and feeding the flame continually with the best and purest oil, that its light may be the brightest possible. The certainty of aim, the steadiness of will, the single-mindedness, the calm, noble, unswerving, persevering onwardness of purpose, which a light such as this gives a man, are above all price. Instead of wandering hither and thither, groping his way like a blind or a benighted person, he walks in the light of day. Whatever his object may be,—and some object it will be whereby God may be glorified and man bettered, —that object he sees clearly: he sees too the straight road leading to it: and along that road he

keeps ever advancing, overcoming the obstacles in his way by God's assistance, and with a gentle but unyielding hand pushing aside whatever would cross or thwart him.

It is not mere head-knowledge however, that St Peter speaks of when he would have us grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is a living knowledge, a practical knowledge, a knowledge of the heart, the only knowledge which God loves: and this, we may be sure, is included in the apostle's precept. To describe it in three words, it is knowledge joined with love. If a man wants to know a thing, he will learn it: if the thing be good in his eyes, the more he knows about it, the more he will love it: and again the more he loves it, the more he will give his mind to it: thus his knowledge and his love will foster each other: and the two will grow together apace. Now that a knowledge of this sort will help a man to grow in grace, it cannot take many words to shew.

For he that grows in such a knowledge of Christ, is growing at once in christian faith and in christian love. And he who has faith and love, has the two eagle's wings which bear the soul up above the cares and snares of life, to that living fountain of light and joy, the Sun of Righteousness in the heavens. It is said that young eagles will

look upon the sun, and gaze till their bright eyes become clearer and more piercing, by drinking in light from that source of all earthly brightness. Follow their example, my brethren: look at Christ. Gaze day by day at the Sun of Righteousness: gaze at him from your youth upward; and your minds will in like manner become brighter and clearer, your hearts will become purer and stronger. There is a special promise in the 40th chapter of Isaiah, that they who wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall mount up,—but whither? To the throne of grace, that there they may receive grace; to the presence of Jesus, that they may converse with him, and dwell with him. They shall mount,—but how? As the young bright-eyed eagle mounts, to drink in more and more light by gazing on the Sun of Righteousness. If blessings such as these be ever vouchsafed to us,—and they will if we strive and pray for them earnestly,—then all that will remain for us, will be to cherish God's blessed gift by a deeper sense of what he has thus done for us, by a greater tenderness of conscience, and a livelier shrinking from every blast of sin. We must give heed to walk in all things according to the light we have received. And we must beware of thinking that what we have is enough. We must endeavour heartily to obtain more light, more

of the knowledge and love of God, more of the spirit of Christ, more of his love and of the power of his holiness, that we may grow in grace, as we grow in years, until we are at last transplanted from earth to heaven, there to grow for ever in the paradise of God.

SERMON IV.

THE FEAR OF GOD.

PSALM cxi. 10.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do thereafter.

I AM going to speak to you of the fear of God. Every one knows what fear is. Every one of us must have felt it in one shape or other. We may not all have been afraid of the same thing: but we have all at some moment of our lives been afraid of something; and that has been enough to teach us what fear is. Most of us must have known, when children, what it is to be afraid of being punished by our parents. Many must have felt what it is to be afraid of offending those we love. Others again have probably been afraid of death, either of dying them-

selves, or at least of losing some very dear relation, a sister, a wife, or a child. Every one too is naturally afraid of pain, and would be loth to put himself in the way of being much hurt without some great need. Every one in his senses is afraid of disgrace, and would be sorry to do anything by which he would forfeit the good opinion of his friends and neighbours. And even those who care for nothing else, care for the law, and fear its punishments, and would gladly escape them. Pain, in a word, and punishment, and shame, and death, are the things which men fear most. There is no virtue in fearing these things. God has made us so that naturally we cannot help fearing them. We may harden ourselves against the fear of them, just as some men have hardened their flesh till they were able to bear the sharpest tortures without flinching. But this hardness is not natural to man: it is not the state in which God made us. Take us as we are by nature, and it is as natural for our souls, when we know what pain and punishment and disgrace and death are, to fear them, as it is natural for our bodies to be burnt with heat, and to be frostbitten by cold.

Now to all these natural objects of fear the Bible would have us add another. It would have us fear God, and fear him too most of all. And why are we thus to fear God? For the best of

all reasons. Because we can do nothing, without his seeing it: for "his eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Because we cannot escape from him: for even if we tried to hide ourselves in a cave on some desert shore, even there would his right hand be upon us. Because, if we offend him and resist him, he is certain to punish us in the end: for he has plainly declared that he "will by no means clear the guilty." Because his punishments are so dreadful and endless: for it is written, "The wicked shall be turned into hell:" "they shall have no rest day or night;" "the smoke of their torment shall mount up for ever and ever." Such are some of the chief reasons why we ought to fear God. Because he sees everything; so that he is sure to see every wicked deed we do. Every act of chambering and wantonness that you have ever been guilty of, every act of rioting and drunkenness that you have ever been guilty of, every act of unkindness and cruelty that you have ever been guilty of,—God saw you do it as plainly as I see you now. But the wrong we do is far from all. God has ears as well as eyes: and every bold word, every bad word, every loose and filthy word, every false word, every harsh, uncharitable word we may ever have spoken,—God was by and heard it. Nay, though

we were to keep from evil deeds and evil words, and only to indulge in evil thoughts, God can look into our hearts and read our thoughts. He can mark, and does mark, all the bad feelings and bad wishes, that we harbour and cherish in our bosoms. Moreover, as God is sure to see and hear and mark all our wicked deeds, and wicked words, and wicked thoughts, so is he quite sure to punish us for our wickedness. For he has said over and over and over again in the Bible, that he will punish the wicked: and God cannot lie: he cannot change his mind: what he has said, he will certainly bring to pass: what he has once purposed, he will purpose for ever. Such is the God with whom the wicked and the disobedient are bold enough to enter into controversy; a God whom there is no deceiving, a God whom there is no escaping, a terrible God, a God of truth and purity and might, a God who has seen all their sins, and has written them all in his book, a God whose punishments are most grievous, most painful, and, what is worst of all, will never end. If they could look forward to a time, however far off, when God's anger would burn out, so to say, and cease to consume the wicked, some little room would be left them to hope and to be comforted. They would have something to look forward to, which would lighten their sufferings. But, as it

is, the last hope, the last gleam of comfort is shut out; for God has said of the wicked, "They shall go into everlasting punishment." (Matt. xxv. 46.) Such, my brethren, is the God whom the Bible would have us fear; and such are some of the chief reasons why it is folly and madness not to fear him.

Of this fear of the Lord the text says, that it is the beginning of wisdom: not wisdom, observe, but only the beginning of it. Till we have attained to a fear of the Lord, we have not so much as begun to be wise. If this be so, brethren, what fools must numbers of men be! For assuredly there are very many men,—God alone knows how many,—who have no fear of God before their eyes. Many never think of God at all. Many, when the dread of his anger crosses them, push it aside, and hush their consciences with some such thoughts as these: "God will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss. If I were a robber, or a murderer, he might perhaps condemn me. But he is too merciful to notice every little failing. It is true, I swear a little at times, and get drunk now and then, and do not think of God and pray to him as often as I could wish, from having a family to provide for, and so much business on my hands. But after all, these are mere trifles; and it is not to be

believed that God will sentence a man to everlasting punishment for such petty, trifling failings." I am sure I may appeal to the consciences of many present, whether this is not the way in which men are apt to quiet their minds, when any serious thoughts of God and of his anger come across them. Yet, if we look into the matter closely, what is this but crying peace where there is no peace? For God has plainly told us in his holy book, that he will punish men for these very things. And dare we call anything trifling, on which God has set the mark of his displeasure? dare we flatter ourselves that he will not punish, when he has said that he will? This same making light of sin is one of the things which the Psalmist lays to the charge of the wicked. Turn to the 94th Psalm, where he is speaking of the wicked-doers. Hear how he tells us they cheer themselves, and encourage each other in their wickedness: "They say, Tush, the Lord shall not see; neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." Is there anybody present, who is comforting himself, and lulling himself in sin, by saying to his conscience, "God will not mind this: he will overlook that; he will not be so severe to us poor frail mortals as the preacher says that he will?" is there any one present, who is holding this most deceitful,

most dangerous language to himself? let him look at the 94th Psalm; and he will read his own condemnation in it: he will see himself plainly set down there as holding the language of the wicked.

Now, so long as a man continues in this wickedness,—so long as he goes on stifling the voice of conscience, the voice of the Holy Spirit within him,—so long as he turns his eyes away from the fear of God,—so long is he wandering in the paths of folly, and a stranger to all true wisdom. He may be a learned man, a shrewd man, a clever man: he may be a good workman, a good mechanic, a good man of business; he may understand all the craft of buying and selling; nay, to use St Paul's words, he may have all knowledge; and yet with all this he is nothing but a fool. He has not so much as begun to be wise. Apart from God there is no true wisdom: and the man who has not the fear of God before his eyes, is living apart from God. What good then will all his knowledge do him? It will perish in the using. It may serve his ends, while he remains above ground, but no longer. It will die with him, and be buried with him: and when he awakes to the terrors of a miserable eternity, he will see what a fool he has been. He will feel and see, that he has been knowing, but not wise,—knowing in that

worldly knowledge which helps a man to push his way through life, but utterly wanting in that pure and heavenly wisdom which leads through Christ to salvation.

The truth of the matter is, that religion,—by which I mean the trying to serve God with all our hearts, and with all our minds,—is the only true wisdom: and because the fear of God is usually the first thing that brings men to true religion, and makes them wish and try to obey God and to serve him, therefore the fear of God is called the beginning of wisdom. Till a man has gained a practical fear of God, he is no better than the brutes that perish. All his cares are fixed on the present world. He takes no more thought about his soul, than if he had no soul to think about. He makes provision for his own body, and for the bodies of his family, but makes little or no provision either for his own soul or for theirs. He feeds his body with the bread that perishes, but does not feed his soul with the life-giving word of God. What less could he do, if he had no more soul than dogs and horses have? Therefore the Psalmist calls him brutish. But let such a man be awakened by the terrors of the Lord,—let him be brought to feel that God's eye is always upon him,—let him be persuaded to think of that strict account which we must all one day give before

Christ's judgment-seat,—let him be made to shudder at the prospect of those horrible burnings which are prepared for the unrepenting sinner,—and there is hope that these thoughts may work a great and good change in the man who was lately so brutish. Will such a man go on in his godless and sinful course, when he sees that it leads to hell? It is to be hoped that by God's blessing he will not. It is to be hoped that the wholesome fear of God's judgements will move him to try to turn to God, with sorrow for his past life, and with a wish to live more righteously and more godly for the future. Here then is the beginning of wisdom. The man, who so late was living a brutish life, begins to lead a reasonable and christian life. The man who a while back was so blind that he could not see God, now begins to see him: he begins to have a sense of his presence: he begins to have a sense of his power. He begins to say within himself, when tempted to any sin, "How can I do this, when the eye of Almighty God is upon me?" Is not this a great and happy and wise change? a change which may well be called the beginning of wisdom.

Moreover the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, because it is a spiritual fear. Wisdom is seeing with the eyes of the soul. There is no wisdom in seeing with the eyes of the body: the

beasts of the field can do that; and they have no wisdom. Wisdom is a gift which God has given to no earthly creature except man; just as he has given the power of reason and of speech to no earthly creature except man. So long then as a man sees only with his bodily eyes, so long he has no wisdom. Wisdom was given us to see heavenly things with, just as our bodily eyes were given us to see earthly things with. But after the Fall, when man had become corrupt, he abused the gift of wisdom, and employed it not for heavenly purposes, but for earthly. Hence sprang the wisdom of this world, which men in their ignorance are apt to deem true wisdom, but which the apostle declares to be false, calling it earthly, and sensual, and devilish (James iii. 15). He who has no other wisdom than this,—he who employs the eyes of his soul in seeking for earthly gains, or earthly pleasures,—he who thus abuses the most precious of God's gifts to vile and unworthy purposes,—is like a man who walks upon his hands and knees, instead of walking on his feet, and using his hands to handle with. If you saw a man walking on his hands, you would say to him, "Get up, for shame; walk on your feet, and put your hands to a better use. Don't lower yourself to a four-footed beast, when God has made you a man." So, when we see a man giv-

ing his heart and his mind to this world, we have reason to say to him in like manner, "Up, heart! up, mind! you ought to rise up to heaven: do not burrow in the earth." Away then with all that false wisdom, which is one of the surest marks of Adam's fall. Had God left us in our fallen state, we should have known no other wisdom. But now that he has taken pity upon us, and has called us to a knowledge of himself, and has been pleased to cause us to be born anew by the influence of his Holy Spirit, one of the first signs of a regenerate life in a man is his turning away from the false wisdom to the true. The eyes of his soul, which before were closed, are opened to see heavenly and spiritual truths; and the first truth they open on is the presence of God.

But to see God, and not fear him, is impossible. Therefore the having a fear of God is justly called the beginning of true wisdom. It is a sign that we are beginning to be wise. It is a sign that a change has taken place within us, answering to the change in the blind man whose eyes Jesus opened: whereas we were blind, now we see. Let me beseech you, brethren, to consider within yourselves what it is that the sinner sees, when the eyes of his soul thus open on the things of another world. He sees the justice of God Almighty. He sees that he has offended the greatest of

kings; he sees that he has been ungrateful to the best of fathers. He sees that his sins are too many to be numbered, and that he has no excuse to offer for them. He sees the golden gates of heaven, which are shutting against him for his transgressions: he sees the burning pit yawning at his feet; he sees and feels himself on the brink of it. Is there any one present who has never seen these things? any one who has never felt how dangerous, how inexcusable, how hateful it is, to commit sin, and to live in forgetfulness of God? If there be, God have mercy upon him! for he is still blind. May the eyes of all such be opened in time to see the things belonging to their peace!

But the fear of the Lord is only the beginning of wisdom; and to begin to be wise is not enough. Therefore the Psalmist adds, "A good understanding have they that do thereafter." As though he had said in other words, "Do not deceive yourselves; do not mistake the prickings of conscience, and the dread of punishment, for such a change of heart and life as alone can be well-pleasing to God. If you fear God in good earnest, shew that you fear him by acting as if you felt that his eye was always upon you." It is not enough to tremble at the thought of the punishment which God's anger may inflict on us: we should have such a wakeful,

such an abiding sense of his presence, as shall keep us from doing wrong, and spur us on to do right. I spoke, at the opening of my sermon, of a child's fearing its father. Now, if that fear does not keep the child from misbehaving and offending its father, what is it good for? When the child trembles at the thought of punishment, yet goes on disobeying its father, can we say with truth of such a child, that it fears its father? No, it does not fear its father, but the rod. So it is with the fear of God: if it does not keep a man from disobeying God, it is not God that he fears, but hell. Bear in mind therefore, that, though the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, unless it leads to holiness of living, it is only the first stage of our punishment: it is only a foretaste of those terrible dreams of torment, which are to haunt the sinner through all eternity. The very devils not only believe, but tremble. Let not your fear of God be like that which is felt by the devils.

I know not how I can conclude this sermon better, than by reminding you that all the fears which are most natural to the heart of man, ought to join in leading you to a practical and restraining fear of God. The evils which men have the greatest dread of, are pain, and punishment, and disgrace, and death. Now what pain can be more gnawing than the pain of the worm that dieth not,

and of the fire that is not quenched? What punishment can be heavier than to be shut out for ever from all happiness and joy? "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, (says our Saviour,) when they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves are thrust out." What disgrace can be greater than to be put to shame before the whole assembled host of men and angels,—to have the black list of all our sins read out,—to have all God's merciful loving-kindness to us, all the lessons we have received, all the means of grace vouchsafed to us, all the warnings of conscience, all the visitations of the Holy Spirit, put before us into one scale, and the paltry temptations, the wretched gains, the foul and flimsy pleasures, the low-born aims, for which we sold our souls, cast into the other scale? and then to see all God's goodness, all the joys of heaven, outweighed by the trumpery with which Satan baited and caught us,—to see that we had sold heaven for a handful of chaff? Surely, if there be a shame which can burn in the very heart's core, it must be the shame of this miserable exposure. As for death, the last thing which men fear, what is that first death, which passes away

in a moment, when compared with that second never-dying death from which there is no resurrection or redemption?

If therefore you have hearts of flesh, brethren, and not hearts of stone, think seriously, I beseech you, of these things. Think of the pains and punishment of the bottomless pit: think of the shame of being outcasts from the presence of God, to live with devils as their slave and their laughing-stock: think of the second death, which is never to come to an end: and may the fear of all these woes so work in you through God's blessing, as to lead you to repentance, to faith in Christ, to a holy and godly life, and finally to everlasting glory!

SERMON V.

WHO ARE GOD'S CHILDREN?

ROMANS viii. 14.

As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

THE great plenty of Bibles and Testaments which God has given us in this land, makes us, I fear, more neglectful than we ought to be of our Prayer-books, especially of that part of the Prayerbook which contains the Epistles and Gospels, as they are called, for the Sundays throughout the year. Now this is just the same kind of mistake as if a man, because he had turnips and potatoes in his fields, were to neglect sowing any in his garden. The turnips and potatoes raised in gardens are generally of a choicer kind. So is it with the little portions of the Epistles and Gospels, which are selected to be read in the Communion Service. They are like so many choice plants culled out

of the New Testament for some useful lesson of doctrine or practice. Therefore, though I have always exhorted you to read your New Testament, I would by no means have you neglect those selections from the New Testament which are printed by themselves in the Prayerbook. Indeed I am not sure that a beginner in Christianity would not do best to set out with studying them. In giving you this advice I am thinking more particularly of the Epistles. We know, on the authority of St Peter himself, that in St Paul's Epistles are things hard to be understood. Now a hard book is not a fit book for a beginner. In Christianity, as in everything else, it is well to begin with what is easy, and to rise by degrees to what is harder. Indeed this is St Paul's own rule: first milk for babes, and afterward meat for strong men. What are we to do then? Are we to follow the example of the Roman Catholics, and to hold back any doctrinal or practical part of Scripture, especially so important a part as St Paul's Epistles, from the people, as too hard for them? That would never do. The great doctrines of justification by faith alone, of forgiveness for Christ's sake, of our being unable to earn God's favour by anything we can do, and of our being too weak and corrupt to take one step toward holiness, except by the assistance of the

Holy Spirit,—these great doctrines are the very foundations of Christianity. They are the very things to give us that sense of sin, that distrust of ourselves, that feeling of entire dependence on God, that love for the Father and the Son, which are the springs and fountains of all christian living. These things moreover are quite as necessary to be taught now, as at any former time: because human nature is not changed: and men are still just as apt to value themselves on their merits, and to make light of their sins, and to think little about God, as they ever were of yore. Therefore, being still prone to the same proud fancies and conceits, we have still need of the same good lessons, to shew us our natural vileness and nothingness in the sight of God. But these lessons are taught more fully, more clearly, and more convincingly in St Paul, than in any other part of the Scriptures. Therefore, seeing that these lessons are so important, and that St Paul is the best teacher of them, it would never do to withhold his writings from the people. Meat must be given them, as well as milk. Still, as all meat is not equally suited to every stomach, the Church, out of the strong meats of St Paul and the other apostles, has picked out the plainest and most nourishing morsels, and sets them from time to time before the people. It has chosen a certain

number of such passages out of St Paul's and the other Epistles, as appeared most likely to be generally useful: and these passages are placed in the Prayerbook by themselves, that even those who cannot understand the whole of St Paul, may be put in the way of reading the plainest and most important parts of him. Therefore I would advise you all to read the Gospels as they stand in the New Testament, but to begin with reading the Epistles in the Prayerbook; and to be content with what you find there, till you have made such progress in the knowledge of holy things, as may encourage you in trying a bolder flight. I do not say, neglect St Paul, or the other Epistles. Only go on by degrees: be content to make yourselves masters of the easier passages, before you meddle with the harder. Be content to exercise yourselves awhile in the shallower places, before you plunge into the deeper, lest you get out of your depth and sink.

I have been led to these remarks by the beautiful Epistle appointed for this day. It is taken from a long, and in some respects a difficult chapter, the 8th of the Epistle to the Romans. Perhaps, if the whole chapter were to be read to you, as it sometimes is among the evening lessons, such a crowd of great, and deep, and noble thoughts would follow one upon another, as to leave no

single clear and well-marked impression on your minds. But now that a few verses, six out of thirty-nine, have been selected,—and those all bearing on the one point of our duties and our dignity as God's children,—it may be hoped that some of you at least have been able to catch their meaning, and to feel it. If you have, how easy will it be for you to strengthen that feeling when you get home, by reading the passage over and over, till its words are laid up in your memories, and its truths are graven on your hearts! What I have just said of the Epistle for to-day, may be said generally of the Epistles for the other Sundays and Holidays through the year. Every one of them contains some short and useful lesson, which you will do well to study Sunday by Sunday, as the year comes round.

Having thus recommended the Epistles generally to those among you who can read, and who wish to know what St Paul and St Peter and St James and St John have left behind for our instruction, I shall now speak to you of that portion of to-day's Epistle which I have chosen for my text: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

I have often tried to fix your thoughts on the great mercy and goodness of God, in calling us to be his children, and adopting us into his family.

This mercy was shewn to every one of us at our baptism; wherein, as the Catechism teaches us, each of us was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. What a dignity and glory it is to be thus admitted into God's family, to be thus made sons of God, is clear enough of itself. If it were not, St Paul might open our eyes to it, by those few striking words, "If we are children, then are we heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ:" that is, if we are indeed the children of God, we shall receive a share of his heavenly inheritance, together with Christ, our elder brother. Christ indeed will have an elder brother's share. His glory in heaven will as far surpass ours, as the glory of the mid-day sun surpasses the glimmer of some little star. But heaven is a large place; and in it are many mansions; and the meanest soul in its darkest corner will be gladdened by the presence of God, and will be treated by him with all the love of a father. So that, though Christ may have the first born's share, every one of God's children will come in for his portion of the inheritance, a portion far above everything that we can conceive or wish for.

Now, seeing that the glory and happiness of being God's children is so very great, it most deeply concerns every one to find out and assure

himself, whether he is in deed and in truth one of those blessed children. For the promise of the heavenly inheritance is made, not to those who call themselves God's children, but who are so. A man may dream he is God's child, when he is the child and servant of the devil; just as the captive in the dungeon may dream that he is a king upon a throne. But the dream does the captive no good: it does not make him a king: it does not deliver him from his dungeon. Nor will dreaming that we are God's children make us so. Simon the sorcerer probably dreamt and fancied that he was one of God's children, when he tried to bribe the apostle to sell him the power of giving the Holy Ghost to whom he would. But, for all that, he was in the bond of iniquity, the slave of sin, and had neither lot nor part in the promises of the gospel. How much then, I repeat it, does it concern us to ascertain whether we are in deed and in truth God's children, or whether we are only dreaming that we are so! Because the dream cannot last for ever: it must end sometime: and the longer the dream, the sadder will be the waking. A man may wake in his youth: and that is best of all; for then he has life before him. A man may wake in his old age: and then he will find that he has laid up sorrow, instead of comfort, for his grey hairs. A man may wake on

his death-bed: and then he will be haunted and troubled by a thousand anxious terrors. A man may wake, as the rich man did, in the midst of torments after death. God preserve us all from such a horrible and hopeless waking!

But perhaps you will tell me, there can be no dream, no doubt, no mistake about the matter. We have all been christened: therefore we must all be children of God, and heirs through Christ of eternal life. This, or something like it, is a very common notion. It is very common for persons to lull their conscience, when it gives them any sharp and friendly warning, with some such thoughts as these: "Well! after all we are Christians; and Jesus Christ is very merciful; and we read, he came to save sinners; and I am sure I wish to do my best; and I come to church whenever I can conveniently: and I never did anybody any hurt; and so I trust that my soul will rest in peace." With some such heap of excuses many stifle their conscience, when it is warning them for their good. Yet these excuses, if we sift and examine them, are only so much chaff at top, and sand at bottom, a mixture of foolishness and lies, without any worth or substance. That the man is truly and really wishing to do his best, when in fact he never troubles himself about the matter,—that is the lie. That we are to be pardoned and

saved for Christ's sake, without repentance and amendment, when the Scriptures say that, "except we be converted, and become as little children, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 3);—that we are to be saved for coming to church, and doing no harm, when the Scriptures say that we "must be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James i. 22),—and again in another place; that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. xii. 14),—this is the foolishness. But the greatest folly of all is, for a man to call himself a Christian, when perhaps the greatest proof he ever gives of being so is bowing his head to Christ's name, when he hears it read in Church, and taking it in vain, whenever he utters it out of church. Do such people never read, never listen to the word of God? Do they not remember those warning words of John the Baptist? "Say not within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father" (Matt. iii. 9); and those words of St Paul's? "He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh." (Rom. ii. 28.) How many other passages too are there, which prove that no man can be saved by words and outward professions; that God looks not to what we call ourselves, but to what we are; and that, if we live the lives of heathens, we are

heathens in his sight, and nothing else;—yea, the very worst of heathens, because we might have been better if we would, because we have had the gospel set before us, which many of the poor heathens never had; but we have chosen to throw away the opportunity, and have closed our eyes against the light, and have turned our backs on God's commands. "Stop, stop! (he calls to you by his word, and by his ministers,) you are going the wrong way: that is not the road: that is not the path of happiness: that is not the path of my children." Alas! in too many cases we might as well call to the wind. The sinner shuts his ears, and rushes away to his lusts, just as the wild horse starts off, when the groom goes after him to bring him to the stable.

Is this behaving like God's children? to shut our ears to him, to fly from his face. Undutiful and runaway children after a time are no longer looked upon as children. Their father banishes them from his love, and strikes them out of his will, and gives his property to their more deserving brothers. Such is the way of earthly fathers; and such assuredly will be the dealings of our heavenly Father. The disobedient and undutiful he will not own: much less will he suffer them in his presence, or allow them to share in the good things which he has prepared

—for whom? "for them that love him," St Paul says: for none else. "He letteth the runagates continue in scarceness." Let us beware then, how we deceive ourselves by speaking peace to our souls, when there is no peace,—by saying, we were made God's children in baptism, and that is enough. Unless God looks upon you as his children now, unless you are living as God's children, unless you die God's children, what good will it be to you that you were once his children years and years ago? The question at Christ's judgement-seat will not be, were you born the child of God? but, did you live and die the child of God? If you did not, what will it boot that you were once entitled to a glorious inheritance, which by your own wilfulness and perverseness you threw away, and exchanged for unutterable woe?

But if neither the having been baptized, nor the being called Christians, nor any other outward mark or privilege, can be relied on as a proof that we are God's children, is there any sign by which a plain man can tell for certain whether he is a child of God? Yes; there is a sure sign: St Paul mentions it in the text: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Here is the sign which St Paul gives us, and which must settle the matter. If we are

led by the Spirit of God, then are we God's children: but if we are not led by the Spirit of God, then most assuredly we are not God's children. The honest inquirer however may still go on to ask, How am I to know whether I am led by the Spirit of God or not? To answer this question, I will lay before you a few plain rules for trying your spirits, and for examining yourselves whether you are indeed led by the Spirit of God; in other words, whether you are walking under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

First, I would have you look which way you are traveling. Are you going along the broad road to destruction, or along the straight and narrow path of life? Are you living in any known sin, outward or inward?—by outward sin meaning drunkenness, fornication, cruelty to man or beast, lying, dishonesty, swearing, evil-speaking, insolence to those above you, harshness to those below you; and by inward sins, anger, covetousness, pride, envy, discontent, a high opinion of yourself, a contempt for others, and selfishness; which last are the sins of the feelings and of the heart, while the others are the sins that shew themselves in outward action. As there are fevers that lurk within, and prey upon the vitals, and these are more dangerous than those sicknesses which come out in blotches and blains,

and other unsightly marks upon the body,—so is it with sins. Those which lurk within the man, under a seemly exterior, are more dangerous perhaps, because they are likelier to pass unnoticed, than the more disgusting offenses of open profligacy. The publicans and harlots, we read, believed John the Baptist, and hearkened to him; but the Pharisees did not: they had made clean the outside of the cup and platter, and so fancied that the inside must be clean also. But, be our sin outward or inward, so long as we indulge it, and suffer ourselves to be led by it, so long as we walk in any path of sin, it is plain we cannot be led by the Spirit of God. A man can no more be walking toward God, while he is following any sin, than he can be walking eastward, when he is stepping westward. For the path of sin leads away from God; and the Spirit of God would lead us to God. Now these are contrary the one to the other: none can be going toward God and away from him at the same time. Therefore, if we are moving away from God, as all who sin do, it must be an evil spirit, not a good one, the spirit of Satan, not of God, that is leading us along so evil a road.

Again, if a man is not advancing and improving in goodness, he cannot be led by the Spirit of God. Leading implies moving. A man cannot be led, and stand still. If we are making no ad-

vance in holiness, if we are not growing in grace, if we have got no further in the conquest of some bad practice, or in the improvement of some good and pious practice, than we were a year ago, it is plain that during the last year we have not been led by the Spirit of God. Our progress on the road to heaven may indeed be slow and unseen, as that of the hour-hand of a clock: but it should be as sure. You can no more see a Christian grow, than you can see corn grow. But you can all see whether it has grown, by comparing it with what it was two months back. So may you discover whether you have advanced in grace, by comparing the present state of your soul with its state, say a year since. Are you more unwilling to sin, more anxious to please God, more diligent in the discharge of your worldly duties, as masters or servants, parents or children, husbands or wives,—are you, in a word, more careful to do your duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call you,—than you were a year ago? If your life can shew none of these marks of progress, if the hour-hand is still pointing where it did at sunrise, the clock must have stopt: you must be halting on your journey: you are not led by the Spirit of God.

These two rules, I fear, must be sufficient for many persons in almost every congregation.

There must be many, I fear, in almost every congregation, who cannot say for themselves honestly and sincerely, that they are not walking in any known sin, and that they are not loitering on their christian journey. Now for all those who, on looking into their hearts, cannot perceive even thus much ground of confidence toward God,—for all those who find, on self-examination, that they have been indulging in some sinful habit, either of feeling or action, or at least that they have been sleeping, when they should have been up and doing, that they have been lagging slothfully, when they should have been pressing onward,—for all such unhappy persons what remains, but that they make the most of the time still left them,—that they turn to God forthwith with penitence and prayer,—that they begin forthwith to forsake evil of every kind, and set about learning to do well,—and that they entreat the Holy Spirit, whom they have hitherto been grieving by their sins and negligence, not to leave them to themselves, but to stretch forth his merciful hand to them, and to lead them along the road to heaven?

But though I fear there must be many in almost every congregation, whom these two rules will be quite sufficient to convince of their sin and danger, yet on the other hand in every house

of prayer throughout the kingdom some there must also doubtless be,— may God increase the number!—who can say with humble thankfulness, "God be praised! I have made some improvement within the last year. It is not so great as I could have wished. It is not so great, or anything like so great, as, considering God's mercy to me, it ought to have been. But still some small progress, my conscience assures me, I have made. My backslidings into sin have been less frequent. I have nearly broken through such an evil habit: I am gaining such a good one. I pray oftener, and more regularly: I used to pray with the tongue alone: but I have now learnt to pray with the understanding: I think of the meaning of the words, and try to lift up my heart to God. I listen more to the word of God. I have been seeking the help of my Saviour Christ, where I never sought it before, by coming to his holy table." Now those whose consciences, when duly examined, return such answers, assuredly are to all appearance under the guidance of God's Spirit. They are walking, so far as man can judge, in the way of God's children. If so, though their steps have hitherto been weak and tottering, yet their Lord and Saviour will not despise the smallness of their beginning. He will call them to him: he will

encourage them on their road: he will strengthen them by his Spirit, that they may walk more firmly and boldly. Still we are so apt to deceive ourselves as to the state of our souls, and it is so important for us to know the truth about them, that there is a third and a fourth rule which I would recommend to such as have reason to believe that they have already set their feet in the ways of godliness, for the sake of making out to a certainty, whether they are led by the Spirit of God.

The third rule is, not only to examine your actions very carefully, but likewise your feelings and motives. If a man is led by the Spirit of God, the leading must be spiritual. The law in the heart, according to the prophet Jeremiah (xxxi. 33), is to be the sign and the condition of the new covenant. Have you the law of God written in your hearts? That is, do you love God, and his law? Do you abstain from sin, because it is displeasing to your heavenly Father? Do you seek to please God, and to do what he would have you? Have you made any progress in those graces which are more especially spiritual and christian, meekness and humility? To keep from gross outward sin, to attend the worship of God regularly, to act honestly and justly by our neighbour,—all this (much as some

of you may think it) is a very low pitch of goodness. A virtuous heathen, a strict Pharisee, rose quite as high as this. The Spirit of God is given us to no purpose, if it does not enable us to soar much higher than the heathen and the Pharisee rose of old. Therefore, instead of valuing yourselves on these first beginnings of common virtue, rather think what a shame it is that we, who have such powerful means of grace vouchsafed to us, should be so tied and bound by the chain of sin, as to keep fluttering just above the ground, when we ought to be mounting beyond the sight of men, and living in the air and atmosphere of heaven. It is a small matter for us, or at least so ought we to deem it, to have the moral virtues which the heathens had. We must press forward from the heathen to the christian life, and seek for the fruits and graces of the Spirit, and examine ourselves carefully whether we have yet attained to them. Above all, look to your hearts: for they are the true temples of the Spirit, and the favorite spots of christian holiness. See whether your truth be truth of heart, your singleness singleness of heart. So too of your lowliness and purity, ask yourselves whether they have taken such possession of you, as to have found their way to your hearts. If they have, happy are you. For no power but the Holy Spirit of God and of his Christ could

have planted them, and made them take root, in a soil by nature so hard, and so barren of anything like holiness.

The last rule I would lay before you is to search honestly whether you feel that you are *led* by the Spirit of God. Think what the word *led* means. A blind man is led; because he cannot see his way: a lame man is supported; because he has not strength to walk without. Are we then aware that in a spiritual sense we are naturally blind and lame? are we aware that we cannot walk so as to please God, except by the help of his Spirit? This is a feeling most necessary to every true child of God. Cherish it by every means. Keep a sense of your utter dependence upon God alive in your hearts. It will do more than anything else to render you humble and thankful and full of prayer. The notion that we are able to make ourselves better and holier will prevent our praying to be made so. For why should we ask for anything, which we fancy we can have without? The whole relation of a christian life, the relation of a child who has nothing of its own, but has abundance, more than it can want in the wealth of an affectionate and bountiful parent,—all this relation is destroyed, the moment we deem we can walk without help and leading, and can go on living on our own store.

Let me entreat you to bear in mind how important it is that we should be led by the Spirit of God. For if we are not under his guidance, we are not God's children; we are not heirs of God, or joint heirs with Christ; we have no share in that glorious inheritance, which our Saviour has purchased for God's servants and children. I said, *our* Saviour; but I said wrong: if we are not the children of God, he is not *our* Saviour. He is the Saviour of them that trust in him and love him. He is the Saviour of the penitent sinner. He is the Saviour of all that come to him for safety. But he is the Saviour of none else.

SERMON VI.

DO AND YOU SHALL KNOW;

OR,

THE WILL AND THE DOCTRINE.

JOHN vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.

THE religion of Jesus Christ is altogether a practical thing. There is only one way of learning it; by practising it. There is only one way of knowing it; by living according to it. This is what our Lord says in the text. "They who will do the will of God, they who will put their hand to the plough, and set about doing their best to obey God, shall know of my doctrine, whether it comes from God or not. Its purpose is, not merely to teach men what is good, but to make them good: and it is only by trying the experiment for himself, it is only by striving to do the will of God, that any man can find out what great power

there is in my religion, to change him into a new creature, and to make him wise unto salvation. Thus will he be convinced that the words which I speak, and which have such power, I speak not of myself, as a man; but that, as the power in them is the power of God, so the words themselves, and the doctrine, must be from God."

Such is the account which Jesus Christ in the text gives of his doctrine. He does not say, that they who go to church twice every Sunday, shall know of his doctrine, whether it is from God. He does not say, that they who read a couple of chapters of the Bible every day, shall know of his doctrine, whether it is from God. But endeavour to do the will of God; and then you will know that the doctrine comes from God. By listening to sermons in church, and by reading the Bible at home, you learn what the doctrine is: but by trying to do God's will, you learn something of much greater importance; you learn that it comes from God. You see its truth. You feel its heavenly power of raising man from sin to righteousness, of freeing him from the bondage of Satan, and turning him into a child of God. In a word, by coming to hear sermons, and by reading the Bible, you learn what a Christian ought to be: by striving to do the will of God, you are a Christian.

This, our Lord tells us, is the right way to ascertain whether his doctrine comes from God. It is the right way, and the only way. Unless we try to do God's will, nothing else can teach us this truth. No labour, no learning, no cleverness, no thought will enable us to find it out. We may read our eyes blind, and wear out our understandings, in poring over the Bible: it will only be the word of man to us, not the word of God.

I began by saying that the religion of Jesus Christ is altogether a practical thing. This is the first and simplest and main reason why we are to learn it practically. Just consider how we are taught anything else that is practical; how a child, for instance, is taught to read. Is it by hearing about reading? or by being read to? A child might hear about reading, and might hear reading, all its life long; and, were this all, it would never be able to tell one letter from another. It can only learn to read by trying to read. It must begin by learning its letters: when it knows its letters thoroughly, it must learn to put them together, first in short words or syllables, and afterward in longer words: and lastly it must learn to put the words together, and to read them as they follow one another in the book. The same holds of everything else that is practical: whatever it may be, it must be learnt by

practice. It is not by hearing or reading about making shoes, that a man becomes a shoemaker, but by trying to make them. Above all is this true of that which is the most practical of all things, the religion of Christ. I call it the most practical of all things; because it is meant to be the rule and guide of our practice, not merely at certain moments, when we are engaged in any one particular employment, but at all times and in all places; because it ought to be the source and spring and mould and rule of all our thoughts and words and deeds. Or can you suppose that the service of the God of heaven is so much easier a task than every other, that, while every other thing we want to do must be learnt slowly and laboriously and practically, the doing the will of God will come to us naturally and of itself? No: this too must be learnt by practice, by patient, diligent, stedfast practice.

But how, you may ask, are we to do the will of God,—how can we even strive to do it,—unless we know beforehand what it is? The question seems a very hard one; and yet the answer is easy: by faith. When a child is learning to read, it has to read at first without knowing how to read. It has to pronounce the letters and the words, without knowing what they are. It has to pronounce them at first after its teacher: by

faith in him it learns what they are: and thus in course of time it gets to know what they are of itself. In like manner God has sent you spiritual teachers,—he has sent you the teaching of his word,—to tell you what his will is, before you can know it for yourselves. There is no one,—in all England there is no one—among you assuredly there is no one—who, if he will but try to make the most of the opportunities God has given him of knowing his will, may not attain in the end to the precious knowledge spoken of by our Lord in the text, the knowledge that his doctrine is of God.

For this knowledge, like all practical knowledge, comes by degrees. Every slight improvement in practice,—nay, every attempt at an improvement, will lead to an increase of our knowledge: while every increase of our knowledge ought in its turn to lead to an improvement in our practice. Every fresh step we take in Christianity, we see further into it; and by seeing further into it we learn in what way we are to advance still further. The practice throws light on the wholesomeness of the doctrine: the doctrine on the other hand furnishes new motives and helps to the practice: thus they go on giving and receiving strength, each from and each to the other. They are like the warp and woof in weaving: the

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doctrine is the warp, into which we weave the woof: every fresh cast of the shuttle brings out more of the warp: until at length the whole is like Christ's coat, without seam, woven from the top throughout. Thus do the knowledge and practice of a Christian meet and unite, and, as it were, grow into one. For what is the doctrine of Christ? that doctrine, which St Paul, writing to the Colossians, calls "the riches of the glory of the mystery." It is, as St Paul there sets it forth, that God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins." It is, that "it pleased the Father that in Christ Jesus should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself: and us too, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in our minds by wicked works, hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present us holy and unblamable and unreprovable in his sight, if we continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel." In other words, the doctrine of Christ is, that all men are sinners,—that all by their sins have offended the holiness of God, and have fallen under his wrath,—but that he,

the eternal Son of God, came down from his throne in the heavens, to be a sacrifice for our sins, and to restore us to his Father's love. Now how can any one have any real and lively knowledge of this doctrine, unless he has set himself in earnest to do the will of God? A minister once told me, that a sick man, whom he had attended, on being asked what he rested his hopes on, replied that he believed he had always led a regular decent good life. On this the minister said: "That may be very well as far as it goes: but, in speaking of your hope of acceptance with God, have you nothing to say of Jesus Christ?" "Yes! (answered the sick man,) I think he must have something to do with it." Something to do with it! Was this knowing the doctrine? Is this like St Paul's way of speaking, when he calls it "the riches of the glory of the mystery?" But how came it that this poor man had so scanty and faint a sense of what Christ has done for us? The reason plainly was, that he trusted in his regular decent life: he thought himself safe enough with that, and did not trouble his head about anything beyond. Let me now go a step further, and ask: how came he to trust in his regular life? Why, because he had never set himself seriously to do the will of God: therefore he had never gained a practical insight

into his own sinfulness and weakness. He measured himself not by God's pure and holy law, but by the low and deceitful standard of the world: so he was satisfied with himself, and had no feeling of his want of a Saviour. Here is a case of a man failing to arrive at a knowledge of Christ's saving doctrine, because he had never made it his business to do God's holy will. I fear too, the case is a very common one, even among those who call themselves by the name of Christ, and who have read their Bible and come to church all their lives.

Not that I mean to speak slightingly of reading the Bible. I have so often exhorted you to study it, you cannot suppose I mean that. Let every man know as much of the Bible as he can: no one can know too much of it. But then you must study it with a view to become better; you must take pains that your advance in doing the will of God may keep pace with your advance in knowing it. This is the right way of studying the Bible, and the right use to put it to. Any knowledge of God's will and of God's love but this will be useless to you: and not only will it be useless knowledge; it will also be imperfect knowledge. A true, a thorough, a saving knowledge of the Gospel can only be gained by practice. And a blessed thing it is for you, my people, that God has

ordained it so to be. If head-knowledge, as it is called, had been the high road to heaven, what would have become of the poor, who have so little time for study? But God in his grace has appointed another way for his people to learn how to serve him: and it is a way which the poor and simple, who have been taught the first principles of their duty, may travel along as easily and safely as the rich and learned. He has made religion a practical matter, to be learnt and perfected in every deed we do, in every word we speak, in every wish and thought of our hearts. Let none say he has no time to learn to be a Christian, if he has time to live and breathe. Have any of you things to vex you? That is the way God has appointed to teach his people patience. Is any one enjoying an abundance of good things? They are given to train us in temperance, and in bounteousness, and in relieving the wants of others. Are some in poverty? It is a lesson of self-denial and contentedness. So whatever may betide you, be it sorrowful, or be it joyful, I would have you think that it was sent you to teach and exercise you in such a grace, or to warn you from such a sin. Thus will you be learning Christianity practically. Thus, by carefully striving to do the will of God, will you be brought to the most perfect knowledge of the doctrine. Thus the tree of the Gospel will indeed

be a tree of life to you, when you have planted a slip of it in your hearts.

But will the tree of the Gospel take root then in man's natural, unturned, uncultivated heart? You might as well throw an acorn on a rock, and expect to see it grow up an oak. Our hearts are stony; and they must be broken up. They have no depth of soil; and new soil must be brought to them. We must do as gardeners do: we must make a new and richer soil to receive the new plant; else it will never thrive in us. Our hearts are lying under the curse: they bring forth only thistles and briars: and we must endeavour to purge them from all such weeds, and to fit them for the knowledge of the doctrine, by trying to do the will of God.

Some however will perhaps ask me: Can we then do the will of God? No, my brethren: of ourselves assuredly we cannot. Therefore Christ does not say, He that doeth the will shall know: for that would be like saying, He that flies up into the clouds shall know. What Christ says is, that he who willeth or desireth to do the will,—for this is the true meaning of the passage,—he who earnestly wishes and strives to do the will of God, shall arrive at the knowledge of the doctrine. How? By doing it? No: but by finding that he cannot do it; by having his eyes opened to the

true state of his soul, to its weakness, its helplessness, its sinfulness. This knowledge is the very thing that a man needs, to bring him to embrace the Gospel with all his heart, so as to put his whole faith and trust in it. In other words, this is the same truth which St Paul declares, when he tells us that the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. That is to say, the knowledge of the obedience which God requires of us, as set forth in the law of Moses,—the conviction that we ought to pay him that obedience,—the feeling that we neither do nor can pay it,—these are the very things to wake a man out of the dream of his own merits, and to tutor and prepare him for receiving the forgiveness of his sins and eternal life as a free gift from God through Jesus Christ. In the first dangerous illness I had after I was grown up, I was forced to keep my bed for a week or more. While I did so, I was not aware how feeble I had become. But when I tried to get up, and could not so much as put on my clothes without help, I found out my own weakness. Just so is it with the sinner. So long as he is sick unto death, so long as he lies dead and almost buried in his sins, so long does he continue in ignorance of his true state. He dreams in his heart, "There is not much the matter with me; I shall easily get well, and have little need of a

physician." Thus he dreams, till God sends something to rouse him from his deadly slumber. Some great disappointment teaches him the vanity of all earthly plans; or some affliction pierces and startles him. The man opens his eyes, and sees the wrath of God hanging like a drawn sword over him. In his fright he perhaps tries to get up. Get up! He can no more get up, and quit his evil habits, than I could get up from my sick bed after my illness. Back he falls, after finding out his own weakness, which before he had no suspicion of: and there he lies, in the wickedness which he is now conscious and afraid of, but which he feels he has not strength to forsake. Meanwhile the wrath of God is still hanging over his head, and seems to be drawing nearer every moment.

To a sinner in this state of conscious guilt and feebleness the Gospel is indeed a blessing. For what does it shew him? It shews him Jesus Christ stepping between, to shield him from the wrath of God, and receiving the blow into his own heart. And when, in his astonishment at so unlooked for a deliverance, he cries to his unknown Saviour,—"Who art thou, thus to take on thyself the punishment which I have so richly deserved?"—how must his heart beat on hearing this affectionate rebuke! "I am Jesus, whom thou hast persecuted all thy life long. Thou wast en-

rolled among my servants in thine infancy, and didst receive my mark, the sign of the cross, on thy forehead. But when thou grewest up, thou desertedst me. Thou hast broken my laws: thou hast neglected me: thou hast set thy heart on the things which I have forbidden. Thou hast robbed my heavenly Father and me of the honour and love which thou owedst us. Instead of serving God and me, thou hast been serving sin and Satan. For all these offenses of thine, my only revenge is dying to save thee. I have died, that thou, and every other sinner, who will only hearken and turn to me, may live. Take thy life, which I have bought so dearly. Arise; renounce thy sins; betake thyself to repentance and holiness; and live." Such is the language which Jesus Christ in his gospel speaks to the awakened sinner. And would not words thus touching go straight to the heart of a man who finds himself in the state I have been describing? To your hearts, it may be, they do not go. Why? Because you are still asleep; because you have not yet begun to try to do the will of God: hence your sinfulness and weakness are still unknown to you. But put yourselves in the place of the man I have been speaking of: picture to yourselves the wrath of God ready to fall on you for your misdeeds. I need not tell you that there it is, hanging over

every sinner, whether he sees it or no, and that "on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." (Matt. xxi. 44.) Suppose then that your eyes were opened, and that you saw it there over your heads, would not the offer of pardon for Christ's sake at once become the very best news I could bring you? Would not the great truth, that Christ died for us, come home to your heart and soul with quite another force, if you could behold him receiving the blow in your place, and drawing off the lightning on his own head? Would not this make you feel the meaning of those blessed words,—Christ has died for me? Surely these things must needs move you, were you to see them. But the conscience of the awakened sinner does see them: therefore they move and shake him to the bottom of his stony heart. The Scripture says, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." (Rom. xii. 20.) This is just the way in which our Saviour tries to work upon the sinner. As soon as he has come to himself, so as to be awake to his own danger, Christ appears to him, and shews him his hands and his side, and says to him, "I have paid all." Does not this heap coals of fire on the sinner's head? Does not this bow him down to the very dust in shame and sorrow, that he should have been so

ungrateful and rebellious against his best friend and only Saviour? Does not this open his eyes also, to see the hatefulness of sin? Before he had thought but lightly of it. Now however the guilt of sin stares him in the face. Turn where he will, he sees it ever before him, written in the blood of the Son of God. Such is the manner in which the first great doctrine of Christianity, the doctrine of the atonement by the sacrifice and death of Christ, works on the heart and soul of the sinner, when he begins to feel an earnest wish to do the will of God. And can he, after thus feeling the power of the doctrine,—can he doubt whether it comes from God? He carries the proof that it does so within him, in his grateful sense of God's goodness, and in his longing thus kindled in his heart to lead a more godly life.

But how is this longing to be satisfied? In my illness, as soon as I found out my weakness, I began wishing that I was a little stronger. But my wishes did not make me stronger: and when I first tried to walk across the room, in spite of all my wishes I should have fallen, if I had not had a friendly arm to hold me up. So is it with the sinner. Christ has saved him from punishment, and in so doing has supplied the first and most grievous of his wants. But he has still another very great and very pressing want. He wants the

strength to lift him up from his evil habits to a life of holiness and obedience. He cannot lift himself up; and Christ as yet has not done this for him. He has said to him, Thy sins are forgiven thee: but he has not yet completed the work of mercy: he has not yet said to him, Arise and walk. It is here, in this hour of conscious feebleness, when the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, that the other great doctrine of our faith steps in: I mean, the help of the Holy Ghost. The man begins to feel that he has a new strength put into him, in addition to his own, and far beyond it. He finds that he can do to-day what he was unable to do yesterday. At first perhaps this may puff him up somewhat; and, as a sick man, on gaining a little strength, is apt to fancy he shall be quite well in a few days; so the sinner, when he has been enabled to withstand a temptation or two, may perhaps fancy that he is already become a master in holiness. But he is soon cured of this mistake. The Spirit of God withdraws, and leaves him to himself; and all his former weakness comes back upon him. Then in his distress does he call upon the Lord, and cry to his God; and the Spirit of God returns to him, and again takes him by the hand, and lifts him up, and enables him to walk safely. This goes on time after time, until his experience at length convinces him that,

so long as he trusts wholly to God, he is borne up along the path of righteousness; but that, the moment he tries to walk by his own strength, his feet slip under him, and he falls. Thus we have the other great doctrine of Christianity brought home to a man's heart, by his striving to do the will of God. He can now say of the promise of the Holy Spirit, as he before said of forgiveness by the blood of Christ, I know that the doctrine comes from God.

Now can you think it possible, my brethren, when a person has been thus thoroughly convinced by his own experience of the truth of these two great doctrines, that any arguments of the most subtle man in the world should shake his faith in them? It cannot be. A mere nominal Christian indeed may easily have his belief in these doctrines shaken, if not overthrown: because to him they are only words, to which he attaches no living meaning. But once make a man feel the power of the doctrines,—let him have been healed by the balm of Christ's blood, let him have leant his frail resolutions on the arm of the Holy Spirit,—what can shake his faith in them then? He has the witness of their truth in himself. He knows it on the strength of the blessings he himself has derived from them. Therefore all the arguments in the world can no more make his faith in them

waver, than the arguments of a blind man, however hard to take off, would persuade you that you do not see. This is what our Saviour calls knowing the doctrine. It is the true way of knowing religious truth: and whereas St Paul says of the vain-glorious knowledge and false philosophy of the Corinthians, that it shall vanish away, the knowledge I am speaking of,—the humble practical heart-knowledge of the great things which the Son and Spirit of God have done and are still doing for our souls,—this knowledge shall never fail, but shall go on increasing for ever.

What has been said of the doctrines of Christ, is equally true of the means of grace by which those doctrines are brought home to us. Their value to the soul can only be learnt practically, from our own experience. Would you know the blessing of prayer? Pray. Would you know the blessing of God's word? Study it. But you must pray with your heart, and study with your heart, with an earnest wish to know God's will, and to do it. The man who comes to church, and yawns through the service,—the man who reads his chapter in the New Testament as a task on a Sunday evening,—can never have a notion what a delight and high privilege it is to the Christian to pray, or what exceeding light and comfort the Christian draws from the Scriptures.

As for prayer, the nominal Christian probably does not know what praying is. He has heard that he ought to say his prayers; and so he says them now and then: and he mostly finds it a wearisome unprofitable ceremony. But saying prayers is no more praying, than a corpse is a living man. Would a creature that had only seen a corpse, be able to make out from it what a living man is? No more can a person, who is only accustomed to say his prayers with his lips, conceive the life and power of a prayer which bursts forth from a beseeching heart. To know what praying is, a man must begin by praying himself: and the more earnestly he prays, the more will he learn to prize the inestimable blessing God has given us in allowing us to speak to him in prayer. In like manner is it with the study of the Scriptures. Those who read the Bible as a mere form, may think that many other books are more entertaining. Those who read it with no view beyond the knowledge they wish to gain from it, may even fancy that there are other books still more instructive. But they who read it for the sake of doing the will of God, will see God's will written in every page of it. Every page will yield them consolation: every page will be a lantern to their steps.

But it is above all with regard to the promises

and higher graces of Christianity, that this practical knowledge is required. The peace of God, as you hear every Sunday, passeth all understanding: that is to say, the mere natural man cannot understand it, cannot frame any notion of it. Learning cannot teach it him. To know what it is, we must feel it. To the children of this world it is as sound to the deaf: to those whose religion is a mere form, it is as music to a man who has noear. But the children of God have an ear for it; so that it finds an answer within them, and tunes all the strings of their hearts. The happiness it bestows is such as nothing on earth can give, such as nothing on earth can overthrow. Only look at the glowing expressions of that happiness, which are strewn so richly through the epistles of St Paul. Only read the beautiful letter to the Philippians, which he wrote when in bonds and in peril of his life. The peace of God breathes through it. His very dangers seem to make him more joyful, more triumphant, as if he was already at the gates of heaven. "Every way (he says) Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Do ye desire, brethren, to feel this joy, that nothing can trouble? You must begin by doing the will of

God. You must begin, as St Paul exhorts the Philippians, by working out your salvation with fear and trembling: and after you have done this faithfully and stedfastly, you may perhaps hear him calling to you, as he called to them, Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice.

SERMON VII.

FAITH.

HEBREWS xi. 1.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for.

OF all God's gifts to man the most comforting and strengthening is faith. "How can that be?" methinks I hear some of you asking, "when St Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians tells us so plainly that charity is greater than faith." If what I just said be true, if faith be indeed the most strengthening and the most comforting gift we can receive, it may seem a hard saying that even charity, or love, should be better than faith. Can anything be better than that which strengthens us and comforts us? I will answer this question by asking one. Can anything be better than that which gives health? Yes surely; health itself is better than that which gives health? So is strength itself better than that which strengthens.

But faith is only that which strengthens. Charity or love is strength itself. The latter is the offspring of the former, the sweetest and most pleasant fruit that the tree of faith bears. Could love be separated from faith, it would be no better than a windfall. But true love cannot; whether it be toward God, or toward our brother. Nay, so closely are they bound together, that, as faith begets love, love in its turn fosters faith. It is so even in our earthly affections. What should we say of that love, whether of a friend for a friend, of a child for a parent, or of a husband for a wife, which did not begin in confidence, and end in confidence? Surely we should all say that it did not deserve the name of love; that it was suspicion, that it was jealousy, that it was doubt, and that these are all of them things most alien and contrary to love. This is the sentence we should pass on such distrust and want of confidence between man and man; and is there less ground for our faith, less assurance for our trust, when the parties are man and God? God is our Father; Christ has called us friends; our Lord has espoused the Church, and united her to him in a mystical bond which is never to be loosed. Friend, husband, father,—all the seeds of trust and love are here. Let them sink deep into your hearts, brethren; and pray earnestly to God, who

giveth the increase, and sendeth his rain to make the earth fruitful, beseeching him to pour down his Holy Spirit upon you, that the good seed may take root in you, and may bring forth a rich spiritual harvest of holy thoughts and heavenly desires, of meekness, gentleness, humility, patience, and godly perseverance in all the works and offices of love.

This love, as I have already said, must spring from faith; and by faith must it be continually fed. It is chiefly from bearing so excellent a fruit, that the tree is such a precious gift to man. Still it does bear that fruit: and as there must be a tree to gather the fruit from, before we can hope to gather fruit, so must faith have grown up and blossomed within us, before we can cool our dry and feverish natures with love and the other fruits of the Spirit. In this sense, as the only true parent of the other christian graces, is faith so highly spoken of in the New Testament; where it is said by St Peter "to purify the heart," by St Paul "to work righteousness," and by St John to be "the victory that overcometh the world."

What then is this faith? Not the hypocritical show of faith reproved by St James. That is only an outward lying mockery of faith, and no more faith itself, than crocodile's tears, as they are called, are the true sorrow of the heart, no more than the

wolves our Lord speaks of became real sheep by putting on sheep's clothing. The faith which God approves is not feigned but true. It springs sometimes in the head, oftener in the heart, but in each case flows on till it has filled both. For it is such a hearty belief in God and in his Son, such a stedfast conviction of the truth of all that he has taught us in the Bible, as mixes itself up with our whole life, spreading, like a finer leaven, through every part of our nature, and leavening what before was hard and heavy, until we become like the shew-bread, of which we read in the law of Moses, fit, when we have been hallowed by the incense of prayer, to be brought to God's holy table.

This is what the apostle means, when he calls faith the substance of things hoped for. In like manner it might be called the substance of things feared. For what is a substance? A thing of the reality of which we can fully satisfy ourselves; a thing we can see and feel and handle, so as to convince ourselves by these and the like methods, that it is a real thing, and not a shadow. Hence you may easily see how faith is the substance of things hoped for or feared. It gives them a substance, by bringing God's promises and threatenings home to our hearts, and keeping them before our minds, and making us feel their truth.

When faith reaches this strong growth, it is sure to do its right work, in holding us back from evil, and spurring us on to good. It is quite sure to do this: because God has so fashioned us, has so made the desires of our hearts shape themselves according to the full convictions of our understandings, that no man in possession of his senses will either wish for what he knows to be utterly impossible, or try what he is quite sure will do him much more harm than good. Infants will often stretch out their little hands, and catch at a flame. Why do grown-up people never put their hands into it? Because we know the certain consequence of meddling with fire, which an infant does not. We have felt the pain of burning, and are afraid of it: and so the thought of playing with the beautiful flame never crosses us. My brethren, hell is hotter than any earthly fire: why then are we not afraid of playing with it? Plainly because we do not thoroughly believe what our Lord has said and threatened; because we think that it is possible to serve two masters, though Christ has told us that it is not: because, though the Bible assures us in a hundred places that liars and swearers and cheats and drunkards, and all other dishonest and ungodly people shall die dreadfully and eternally, we still listen to the whispers of the serpent, and flatter ourselves that

things will turn out otherwise in our case, and that we shall not surely die. What is this but unbelief? Were a cup of something that looked like a pleasant refreshing liquor given to a thirsty man, and were he told that it was poison, if he believed the warning, would he drink it? Clearly not. If he did drink it, this would be a clear proof that he did not believe the warning. Now the cup of drunkenness is the worst of poisons. Experience proves that it kills the body: the Bible tells us that it will drown the soul. Yet the sot drinks on, hoping where no hope is, casting God's holy word behind him, and shewing by his stubborn persisting in his wickedness that he does not believe its warnings to be true. In like manner all other kinds of wickedness are signs of unbelief, and prove that the fear of God's judgements is seldom present to our minds. Were it otherwise, had this godly fear been wrought into our souls through fervent prayer, and the diligent study of the Scriptures, we should fly from sin, and shun temptation, even as we should shun and fly from the plague.

Moreover, as a hearty belief in the threatenings of the Bible would scare men from all sin, so would a hearty belief in its glorious promises stir them up to all goodness. For as the proper business of man in this world is to do the will of God,

faith, which is a man's proper principle, is a stirring, active principle. Look at the power which a strong persuasion and belief has in the affairs of this world; and you may judge what ought to be its power in the affairs of heaven and of eternity. Only give a man good grounds for believing that he will make a great fortune by going to India; he will leave his home, and cross the seas, and bear all manner of hardships, and expose himself to the dangerous diseases common in hot climates: he will do all this readily and cheerfully: and though he should fail once and again, he will persevere until at last he succeeds. Now were any one to ask this man, why he runs into all these toils and perils, what would be his answer? "I do all this, because I believe that I shall grow very rich thereby." Our Lord, you remember, compares his kingdom to a merchant, who, when he had found a pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Men will do this for the sake of obtaining a pearl. They will do thus much for the sake of gaining a thing that they truly believe to be desirable and precious. Should not we then, if our faith were as strong as the faith of the children of this world,—if we as thoroughly believed that joys and glories, greater than we can ask or conceive, are stored up in heaven for such as are diligent

in fulfilling their duty to God and their neighbour,—should not we, if we really believed this, do as much to obtain this happiness, as the merchant to get his pearl? He, we read, "sold all that he had." Which of us has ever done as much, or half as much, or a tenth part as much, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven? Alas! it is still as it was in our Lord's days: the children of this world are still wiser in their generation than the children of light. We profess to believe that treasures in heaven are far better than treasures on earth. Were any one to ask us, we should say, that there is not the slightest comparison between them. Yet for the latter, which we declare to be of little worth, we labour from morning to night; while we leave the former, though above all worth, to take their chance. Does not this prove that our faith is only lip-deep, a string of words, and nothing more,—that things hoped for have no substance in our eyes,—that we do not heartily believe heaven to be worth so very much, or that there will be any great difficulty in getting there? We shall arrive there at last, we flatter ourselves, if we live long enough. Meanwhile there can be no great harm in stopping a little, and idling a little, and sleeping a little by the way. But what if we do not live long enough? What if the night of death, when no work can be

done, overtake us in the middle of our journey? What if a storm break over us? Where shall we take refuge? where shelter ourselves from the wrath of God?

My brethren, would you think thus lightly, thus carelessly, of heaven, if you, like St John, had seen the holy city coming down from God? if you had heard the great voice saying, "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: behold, the tabernacle of God is with men; and he will dwell with them; and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." (Rev. xxi. 3, 4.) If you had heard these gracious promises with your bodily ears, if you had seen this glorious city with your bodily eyes, would you think of loitering and dallying on the road? When you read the Bible, if you had but faith, you would hear all these things with the ears, and see them with the eyes of faith. St John, who heard and saw them, has written them in the book of Revelation for our instruction, that, knowing what a prize is set before us, we may walk worthy of our calling, and give all diligence to make it sure.

Hitherto I have spoken of faith solely as it regards the things of eternity. But there is also a faith which regards the things of this world. For

God is not the God of heaven only: he is also the God of earth; and our belief in him must apply to our state here, as fully and strongly as to our state hereafter. We must look up to him as the Father of all mercies, as the giver of every good we enjoy or hope for, as our counsellor in doubt, our friend in need, our comfort and support in sorrow. We must believe him to be all these things; because the Bible tells us that he is so. If we do not, the plain truth is, we do not believe the Bible. Are we not told that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our heavenly Father? that the very hairs of our head are all numbered? Are we not commanded to make all our desires known to God? And can we truly believe that these, and numberless other like passages, do indeed come from God? yet at the same time feel doubts about the events in our own lives, whether they are ordained by God or no? The real Christian feels no such doubts. In all that happens in this world he tries to discern the finger of God. In all that happens to himself, he sees the dispensations of a loving Father, —if his lot be dark, his merciful chastenings,—if bright, his gracious bounty. This is that dutiful trust or reliance in God, which shines so in the patriarchs of the Old Testament, above all in Abraham, who was ready to offer up even his son,

his only son, Isaac, at the Lord's command. Therefore did he obtain the glorious name of the Father of the Faithful. Would we approve ourselves his children, we must imitate his faith, by resting wholly on the goodness of God as our only staff and comforter. For this is faith, as shewn forth in the concerns of this mortal life. It is to trust in the promises of God, when sorrow and death are gathering round us. It is to uphold ourselves in the lowest nakedness of poverty, by throwing ourselves on his fatherly care. It is to be cheerful in the midst of gloom, to smile when all around is frowning, to be content under the pressure of tribulation, and to feel that all things are working together for our good under the guidance of all-wise love. It is to strengthen ourselves in God when we are weakest, to believe when we see no hope, to give back all God's best gifts to him without a murmur, parents, brothers, sisters, friends, wife, children, whenever he is pleased to call for them. All these things are impossible to the natural man: but all things are possible to faith: and blessed are they who have such a faith as will enable them to work these miracles.

I will conclude by exhorting you in the words of St Paul: "Examine yourselves, brethren, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves." (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) How is this to be done? St Paul

goes on: "Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" This is the touchstone of faith. If Jesus Christ dwells in us, we are true believers: if he does not, we have no faith. But how shall we know whether Christ dwells in us or not? St Paul tells us this also: "If Christ be in you, the body is dead, by reason of sin; but the spirit is life, by reason of righteousness." (Rom. viii. 10.) This is the Christian's mark, and the sign of a true believer,—a death unto sin, and a living unto righteousness, —a mortified body, and a quickened spirit.* By this we see what we have to trust to. For such believers, and such only, as bear this christian mark, will be acknowledged by Christ to be his servants and his brethren, in that great day when hope and trust shall give place to assurance and possession; and when they who have been faithful in a few things, that is, they who, while they lived, were full of a sincere, active, humble faith, shall enter into the joy of their Lord.

* From the conclusion of the Discourse on Faith in Taylor's Life of Christ.

SERMON VIII.

WHY WAS THE SPIRIT SENT?

OR,

WE MUST NEEDS BE HOLY.

1 THESSALONIANS iv. 3.

This is the will of God, even your sanctification.

IT was not for nothing that the just and holy God sent his only begotten Son into the world. It was not for nothing that the eternal Word left the bosom of the Father, and became flesh, and, after spending many years on earth as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, at last ended a life of toil and trouble by a painful and shameful death. Nor again was it for nothing that, after his resurrection and ascension, the same Son poured down spiritual gifts on men, and sent the Comforter, even the Spirit of God, to his people. All this, we may be quite sure, was not

done for nothing. It must have been done to answer some great purpose. Let us try to make out what that purpose was, and whether there was one such purpose or more.

The first purpose, which, we learn from Scripture, was to be answered by Christ's coming in the flesh, was, as St Paul tells us in his epistle to the Galatians, (iii. 13,) that he might "redeem us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Such was the purpose of Christ's death: and that purpose it has answered fully. For, as St Paul there declares, "Christ *hath* redeemed us from the curse of the law."

But there are other things in Christianity beside the death of Christ; and they must have their purpose also. There is the coming of the Holy Ghost, about which our Lord and his apostles say so much. Why was the Holy Ghost sent to us? Why does he vouchsafe to come? He comes to make us holy to the Lord. He comes to renew that image of God within us, which was lost through the sin of Adam. You may remember, in the account of the Creation, that God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him." This image of God in the soul of man,—for that of course is the thing meant,—did not descend from Adam to his chil-

dren. He lost it at the Fall, and so could not leave it to his posterity. Adam's son was born, not in the image of God, but in the likeness of sinful man. So we are told at the beginning of the 5th chapter of Genesis: "This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him. And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth." So that Seth was born, not in God's likeness, but in Adam's likeness, not after God's image, but after Adam's image. What was the consequence? "That all flesh corrupted his way upon the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually." (Gen. vi. 5. 12.) It was in vain that God sent the Flood, and swept away that wicked corrupt race, and only spared Noah and his family. The evil weed soon sprouted afresh in the hearts of Noah's offspring, and spread over the earth, and covered it with a thousand horrible kinds of sin. At last it became quite clear, that, so long as this evil root, this original, hereditary taint remained within us uncorrected, so long men would go on sinning, nay, would grow worse and worse; just as a bowl with a bias, if you try to send it straight, the longer it rolls, the further it will swerve. The longer man was left to himself, the worse he grew,

the further he was carried by the evil bias within him from holiness and righteousness.

Now such a state of things could not be allowed to go on. Christ would have died in vain, if mankind, notwithstanding his death, had continued at enmity with God. Therefore, that he might finish the work he had begun for us, he sent us his holy Spirit to correct the bias of our evil nature, and gradually to renew the image of God in our souls. Mind, he does not destroy and root up the evil principle which we inherit from Adam; but he offers us a good principle strong enough to overcome it. All this was done in order that we might be made new creatures, that, as St Paul says (Eph. iv. 23, 24), we might be "renewed in the spirit of our minds, and might put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Here then is another great purpose, which the plan of our redemption is meant to answer. The death of Christ was to procure our pardon, and to redeem us from the curse of the law: the coming of the Holy Ghost is to make us new creatures, by giving us the strength to become so. For God does not force us to obey him, whether we will or no. He loves a willing and a reasonable service: therefore he works upon our will. By every persuasive argument, by every

tender entreaty, by every inspiring promise, by every fearful threat, he endeavours to frighten us from wickedness, and to win us over to holiness and godliness.

Hence we may learn the absolute necessity of our being made new creatures, and renewed in the image of God. For this is the will of God, even our sanctification: and God's will must be done. If Christ's death proves that, without a spotless sacrifice, there could be no forgiveness for us; the outpouring of the Holy Ghost proves that, unless we become new creatures, we cannot be received into heaven. For can any one suppose that so much would have been done and suffered, unless there had been an absolute need for it? Would the Son of God have humbled himself, and become obedient unto death, if we could have been redeemed without a price? Would the Spirit of God vouchsafe to come and dwell in the polluted chambers of our hearts, if we could possibly be saved without holiness? No, my brethren, God never worketh in vain. It is to cure the strain and wrench, which our nature got through Adam's fall,—it is to rebuild the temple of God in the heart of man, which sin and Satan by their fraud and malice had thrown down,—it is for these ends that the Holy Ghost was given: therefore these ends must needs be of

the utmost importance. We are too apt to say within ourselves, "Christ has done all for me, therefore I need do nothing for myself." Nay there are some, whom the devil has so utterly deluded, that they will even be mad enough to cry, "Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound:" that is, let us not be afraid of sinning, because Christ has bought our pardon. You know what St Paul says, when this wicked thought comes across him in the course of his argument (Rom. vi. 1). He cries out, God forbid! as if he had said, Can such a thought, a thought so impious, so foolish, so thankless, find place in any heart! In like manner would he cry out against those in our times, who say, "Christ has done all, and I need not trouble my head about the matter." To them too he would say, "God forbid! drive that wicked thought out of your hearts: Christ did not come, that you might go on sinning with impunity; but that you might be enabled to leave off sinning, and to turn to righteousness and to God. He came, as he himself tells us, to fulfill the will of God: and this is the will of God, even your sanctification."

Moreover, since sanctification is declared in Scripture to be the especial work of the Holy Ghost, this clearly proves the difficulty of that work. That must needs be a great and difficult

task, which the Holy Ghost has taken upon himself. Could a lesser arm have upheld us in our battle against sin, God would have sent us that lesser and weaker arm. But he sends us his own Spirit. The work then, from its importance and difficulty, must be worthy of that eternal Spirit. Can I say more to awaken you to watchfulness? A great work, a great struggle, let me rather call it a long and desperate warfare, is before you. The enemy is at your gates. Nay, he is already in the fortress: he has lodged himself within your very heart. But he must be driven out at all hazards. God offers you his Holy Spirit, to aid your infirmities, and to help you in this holy war. Does not his offering you such an ally prove how extreme your danger is? Act then like men who feel their danger. Lose no more time. Let not the enemy of your soul gain another step, if you can help it. And you can help it by God's assistance, if you will. For it is written, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James iv. 7.) Not that he will retreat quietly, and give you back your heart at once. He knows the value of a heart too well: he will fight for it inch by inch. Every evil habit, every lustful habit, every selfish feeling, every proud and revengeful and unkind feeling, every envious and malicious feeling, every covetous and worldly feeling, will serve him for

an entrenchment behind which to renew the battle. I say not this to discourage you. The God of truth has promised us that, if we bear ourselves like men in this good fight of faith, in the end we shall be more than conquerors. But I say it to rouse you. Would that I could! would that my voice were like a trumpet, to summon you to the battle of the Lord! If you were soldiers in one of the king's garrisons, and an enemy, by surprise, by stratagem, by treachery, had found his way within the walls, would not a cry to arms be heard from every true soldier in the town? The worst of enemies, the cruelest, the most perfidious, an enemy who longs to destroy you for ever, is now within your very heart. Arm, arm to the battle! put on the whole armour of God. Above all, entreat the aid of the Holy Spirit, who is only waiting to be entreated.

But the work of sanctification is something more than merely driving out the Evil One. It is not enough to overcome and bind the old man, which has hitherto held a tyrannous sway within us; we must replace him by the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. It is not enough to pull down the strongholds which Satan may have raised for himself in our hearts; we must build up a house of God in their stead. But what kind of a house?

A house like the Jewish temple, which was half church and half fortress. Such should the house of God be in the soul of every true Christian. It should be holy as a church of God: it should be strong as the hill of Zion against the enemy. To say the same thing in plainer words, piety and strength are the two main requisites and most essential parts of true sanctification.

Piety, or love and devotion to God, you must all see, is necessary to holiness. To sanctify or hallow a thing, is to set it apart for God's service. Thus the Bible is holy, because it is God's book: and the first day of the week is holy, because it is the Lord's day: and a church is holy, because it is God's house. Thus Christians too are called in Scripture the holy, and the saints, because they are God's people. So, when we say that it is God's will we should be sanctified or hallowed, this is the same as saying that our hearts ought to be like a church. Now consider what is necessary to make our hearts like a church. One thing necessary for that purpose is, that they should be full of prayer. A church is a house of prayer: and our hearts cannot be like churches till they are full of prayer also. Again, a church is the appointed place for reading and explaining the word of God: and our hearts must resemble it in this too; the word of God must be the food of our

minds, the delight and meditation of our hearts. Moreover a church is the last place where any man would think of doing any wicked, any unjust, any unclean thing: so should it be with the heart of a Christian. It must not be a den of thieves, nor a hiding-place for foul vermin. Above all, a church is devoted to God. This is the great mark of the Christian: he should be devoted, heart and mind, body and soul, he should be given up altogether to God's service. He is not indeed to be always praying, nor always reading the Scriptures: but he is to be always serving God. For this is our reasonable service, and the great glory and privilege of the christian name, that, whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we may do it all to God's glory. "I have set God always before me:" this should be our principle; and it will grow to be our exceeding great delight.

But if piety, or love to God, is necessary to form holiness, strength is necessary to defend it; not a proud reliance on our own strength; but a humble exertion of such means as we have received, and a resolute constancy in doing our very best to preserve our holiness unspotted. Our love must not be a mere feeling that ebbs and flows; nor a sparkling flame, which crackles and dies: it must be steady, unwavering, and burning bright to the end. There are some, says

our Saviour in the parable of the Sower, who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy, but have not root in themselves, and in time of temptation fall away. Do not mistake any feeling of joy, which may come upon you when you hear the word of God, for a proof that you are among God's people. Strength, as well as liveliness, is necessary to a principle: and it is the principle of sanctification, the principle of giving yourselves up to him, and giving up everything that offends him,—it is this principle carried into practice, that God requires of you; not a mere feeling, which has no root, and which every gust of passion may blow down and carry away to sin.

I know not how I can conclude better, than by warning you of some of the temptations most likely to try your strength, and thwart your progress toward holiness. Among the chief of these temptations are pride, the lusts of the flesh, and covetousness; covetousness, or the love of money; because where your treasure is, there will your heart be also; the lusts of the flesh; because it is expressly said that they war against the soul; pride; because that was the devil's sin, and the prime cause which first drew him, and afterward drew man away from God. These are the three unholy temptations: and though they rarely assail a man all at the same time, yet they relieve one

another, as it were, and harass the Christian with an unceasing warfare. Does he resist, or has he outgrown the temptations of the body? Covetousness and worldly cares strive to seize his heart. Are they too driven back? Pride is sure to come and tell us how bravely we have fought, and how good we are: and if we listen to its flatteries, that will spoil all. So that a Christian has need to be blind and deaf,—blind to the pleasures of the body, and the glitter of worldly goods; deaf to the bewitching voice of pride. What then! shall we put out our eyes and our ears, that we may enter into life blind and deaf? This indeed were far better, than, having eyes and ears, to be cast into hell, the unholy victims of lust, or of covetousness, or of vain and selfish pride. But I will shew you a more excellent way. Keep your eyes and ears, and use them: only use them rightly. Fix your eyes on the hope of heaven, and on the goodness of Christ your Saviour: open your ears wide to the voice of God speaking to you in holy Scripture: and, as a greater light will always bedim a less, and as a greater and louder sound drowns and swallows up a less, so will it be here also. The light of God, if you look for it, will be so glorious to you, and the voice of God, if you listen to it, will be so sweet to you, that you will have neither eyes nor ears for the gaudy bau-

bles and shrill decoy-notes of the world. This is the best preparation which a man can have for heaven; if it be not a heaven upon earth. "If a man love me, (says our Saviour,) he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." (John xiv. 23.) But where the Father and the Son are, there is heaven.

SERMON IX.

THE GOSPEL LEAVEN.

MATT. xiii. 33.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

THERE are two things we should always keep in mind,—what we ought to be, and what we are. In fixing our eyes on what we ought to be, we see the good we should aim at: in looking at what we are, we see the evil we should get rid of. If we thought only of what we ought to be, we might pass through life without ever finding out our own sinfulness, and might even fall into fancying that, because we know and approve what is good and right, we must be good and right ourselves. On the other hand, if we kept our eyes only on what we are, we should grow so accustomed to our sins, and to the sins of those about us, that we should

cease to think of the great guilt and danger of such common every-day matters, and perhaps should get almost to look upon them as things of course. A man may walk with his eyes bent on the ground, till he grows double: a man may live in sin, and hear of sin, and look on sin, till he loses all sense of uprightness. For these reasons the two things,—*what we ought to be*, and *what we are*,—should often be compared together. When this is done, and they are brought before a man, and the difference between them is pointed out to him,—when the preacher says to us, "Look here! this glorious pattern of excellence is what God designed you to be; but, alas! that little puny, crooked, stunted thing is what you are,"—the glaring contrast between what we ought to be, and what we are, may awaken even the proudest and most conceited to a sense of their manifold imperfections, and may move them for very shame to set about mending and improving.

Now what we ought to be, we may learn from the parable which I have chosen for my text. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." You all know what leaven is, or at least you know what yeast is, which is nearly the same thing. You know too that, if you want to have good bread, you must

begin by getting good yeast, and must knead it up with the flour, so that the dough may rise and become light, instead of being heavy and lumpish. Now Jesus Christ in this parable tells us, that, as yeast is mixed up with flour, and works its way through every part of it, in order to turn it into bread, in like manner must his Gospel be mixed up with the hearts of men, and must work through every part of them, before they can be turned from children of death into what children of life ought to be. The leaven of his word must work in them, until the whole is leavened,—not only their outward behaviour, but their inward feelings also,—not only their deeds, but their words, and their very thoughts,—and not only those feelings and thoughts which seem to belong more nearly to religion, but all their feelings and all their thoughts. Whether in church or out of church, at home or abroad, in business or in pleasure, whether with his family, or with his servants, or with his friends,—wherever the Christian may be, and whatever he may be about, the leaven of the Gospel will be living and working in him. Whatever he does, he will do as unto God, always bearing in mind that he is God's child and God's servant. As a good child, and a good servant, always keeps his father's or his master's will steadily in view, and endeavours

to perform it, so does the follower of Christ try to follow Christ in doing the will of his Father. As light cannot hide itself, or check itself, but, when a candle is burning in a room, it fills the whole room with light, and leaves no corner of it in darkness; so, when the light of the Gospel is burning in a man, it must needs spread through every part of him, and fill every part with light: and it enables him to walk in everything, and to act in everything, not blindly, as in darkness, but seeingly, so that he knows what he ought to do, and is able to do it. This, I say, it must needs do, unless there be something within him to check it: for the light will not check itself, or stop of itself. The leaven will work through his whole heart and soul and mind, raising them all, turning them all from heavy lumps of dough into nourishing wholesome bread. There is no part of a man's nature which the Gospel does not purify, no relation of life which it does not hallow. It does not make him less a husband, less a father, less a son, less a servant, than he was before: it does not rob him of one of his finer feelings, of one of his home affections, of one of his powers of body or of mind: but it gives them all a lift, and sanctifies them all, and makes them all rise heavenward.

This, I say, is what we ought to be: this is

the effect which the Gospel ought to produce on a man's character, and which it would produce, if it were received with childlike simplicity and devotion. But does it in fact produce this effect? Does it do so frequently and commonly? Has it done so in all of us, in whom it ought to have been working ever since we were baptized into the name of Jesus? Are we what we ought to be? This is the second question: what are we? What is the nature of the characters which we find among the bulk of men calling themselves Christians? This is the subject on which I am going to preach to you to-day. I am going to speak to you of the truth, not as it is in Christ Jesus, and as it ought to be in you, pure and beautiful and spotless,—but of the truth as it is to be seen in too many calling themselves Christians, corrupt and deformed and full of spots. I am going to shew you how in point of fact the leaven of the Gospel does work, or rather how its working is checked and hindered, in the bosoms of too many, who would be shocked and angry if I told them that they are far from the kingdom of God. Yet if it be true that, in whatever man the principles of christian holiness exist in spirit and in power, they must needs go on working, until the whole man is leavened, what must we think of those persons who are content to stop

short of that total leavening? I say, who are *content* to stop short; for I am not speaking of those faithful Christians, who, conscious of their failings, are striving to press on toward perfection. To them I have only to say, God speed you on your road! Many however are making no such efforts: some of these are not yet leavened at all; some may be a quarter leavened, some half leavened, and some three parts leavened. But whatever differences there may be among these four classes, they all agree in this,—that they are content to stop short of that total leavening, which alone proves the authority of God and of his Son to reign above all and over all in the heart. Now willingly to stop short of this total leavening is willingly to stop short of heaven. For what says the text? The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened. The whole then must be leavened, or at least must be in a fair way of being leavened: else the principle at work within us is not the pure and living principle of Christ's kingdom: it is not Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God, unto salvation. For Christ's power is almighty. He did not, when on earth, cast six devils out of Mary Magdalene, and leave one: he cast out all the seven. He did not partly cure the lame man at

the pool of Bethesda: he made him every whit whole. So was it during our Saviour's stay on earth: and so must it be with us his people, now that he is King in heaven. Every high thing that exalteth itself within us against the known will of God must be cast down: every thought must be brought into obedience to Christ. Less than this must not satisfy us, if we would be numbered among Christ's true people. What then ought we to think of those who are satisfied with less? Yet we ourselves are perhaps among the number. We have perhaps been content to go on hitherto with an unleavened heart, with an unleavened will, with an unleavened tongue, with an unleavened temper; and, unmindful of what we ought to be, are satisfied to continue as we are. Surely a danger of this kind deserves to be well guarded against. Look then on the pictures I am about to set before you: listen to the descriptions I shall now draw, first of those unhappy persons who are not leavened at all, next of those who are a quarter leavened, thirdly of those who are half leavened, and fourthly of those who are three parts leavened: and as each of these four pictures passes before your eyes, say to yourselves, Is this my state?

First, there are persons, I fear, in every congregation, who as yet are not leavened at all.

And who are they? Why, they are those who put on their religion with their Sunday clothes, and with their Sunday clothes take it off again. They come to church, when they have nothing else to do: they say the Lord's Prayer now and then: if they can read, they sometimes read a chapter in the New Testament. This makes up the sum of their religion. Except at those particular times when they have a Bible or Prayerbook in their hands, they act, and think, and speak, as if there were no righteous God in heaven. Can we say of such persons that they are leavened? They have not even begun to be leavened. The leaven of the Gospel has not begun to shew itself in any part of their behaviour. There is nothing in their lives, which proves them to be the better for all they may have learnt of God and Christ. Therefore I can only liken them to flour into which leaven has been put; but, from something wrong or other, it has not begun to work. If flour in such a state deserves to be called bread, then may men in such a state deserve to be called Christians. Now can this be a safe state to loiter and to sleep in? Can they be safe, who have not so much as taken the first step toward becoming Christians in anything more than name? If any such be here present, I beseech you, weigh this well. Perhaps you have reached the noon of life;

nay, perhaps you are already in the evening of your days, and the shades of night, the shades of death, are closing round you. You have a great deal of work on your hands; you have a long journey to take; and you have not even put your hands to the plough; you have not yet entered upon the road to God. Is this a safe state for any one to tarry in a moment longer? Up and work, while it is yet day with you; up and on your road to heaven. Hasten to Christ; for he has said, I am the door, and the way, and the life. Faith in him is the only door, keeping his commandments the only way, that can lead you to life eternal.

But there is a second class of persons, a shade better than the former, persons who have some general notions and faint feelings about religion, but are held in bondage by some known sin. These I call the quarter leavened. Religion has begun to make some slight impression on them. Perhaps the threatenings of the Gospel have startled them; or its promises have caught their fancy. Perhaps the goodness of their Saviour has kindled a spark of grateful love in their hearts. They would fain go to heaven, and flee from hell, and follow Christ, and own him for their Lord and Saviour, if they could do it all without pains or cost. But they cannot. Heaven is not to be

reached so easily. They must work out their salvation: they must strive to enter in at the strait gate, and to walk along the narrow way: they must follow Christ with a cross upon their shoulders: they must deny themselves: they must fight against the sin to which they have hitherto been captive, and not only fight against it, but conquer it; and not only conquer it, so as to be free from it in practice, but they must even learn to hate it. Now all this effort, and striving, and battling, is more than they can make up their minds to. Yet until they have resolved on this, and have done it, they cannot be called Christ's people. For what does St Paul say? "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." So that, unless we have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts, —unless, to say the very least, we are doing our utmost for Christ's sake to mortify and destroy all the evil passions and desires so agreeable to our corrupt nature,—we are none of Christ's; we have no claim to be numbered among his people. But perhaps you will tell me that these men are to be pitied for living, as they do, in sin. You will plead in their behalf, that they do not love their sin, but sin against their better judgement; that they are carried away in spite of themselves by the force of habit, by temptation,

by the example of others. I answer, God forbid that they should love their sin! if they did, they would not be so much as a quarter leavened. Still it is quite enough to condemn a man, that he is habitually guilty of what he knows to be sinful. Hear what St Paul says of such a man: he calls him the slave of sin; and his wages are to be death. These men then, even by the shewing of those who speak the best of them, are slaves, the slaves of sin. Until the Gospel-leaven has spread through the hearts and lives of these poor slaves, until Christ has set them free from the chain of their sins, until they have become Christians in feeling and deed, as well as in wish and word, they must not cherish a hope of that eternal life which Christ has prepared for such as truly love him. For everlasting life is the gift of God: and he will never give so good a gift to the slaves of sin; he will keep it for his own servants, who have served him faithfully and from the heart.

The third class I am to speak of are the half leavened. I call those half leavened, who divide their life into two parts, confining their religion to particular times, when they are engaged in the worship of God, while they carry on their worldly affairs in a worldly spirit. These persons are generally well enough as far as the external

form goes. They are free from all gross vices; they are decent and orderly in their way of living; they observe all the ceremonies of religion: if God were satisfied with outward worship, they would be as good Christians as any. But follow them to their shop, to their business, to their families, and what becomes of their religion? It is nowhere to be seen. Ask after it: they will tell you that they are not methodists, that religion is a very good thing in its proper place, that they are quite as strict as their neighbours, that they never swear, nor do anybody any harm, that they would not be guilty of anything really wicked on any account, but that, living in the world, they must needs do as the world does, to avoid being cheated and laughed at. This, or something like it, is the language of the half leavened. But is this the language of the Gospel? Look the whole New Testament through, from the first chapter of St Matthew to the last of the Revelation, and see if you can find a single word in favour of doing as the world does. Not one such word will you find there: but you will find many words, many texts, many warnings, many commands, against it. You will find St Paul (Rom. xii. 2) telling us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed, or changed so completely, as to become quite new men. You

will find St John (1. ii. 15) exhorting us not to love the world, nor the things of the world; for, if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. You will find St James (iv. 4) declaring that the friendship of the world is enmity with God; so that whoever will be friends with the world, is the enemy of God.

As for doing as others do, if that is to be the rule of right, what is the meaning of all those texts, which tell us that Christ came to redeem us to himself for a peculiar people? Peculiar in what? Why, in acting differently from others. We must be peculiar, if we are Christ's people, in utterly renouncing Mammon. We must be peculiar in acting upon those christian principles, which are foolishness to the worldly. We must be peculiar in taking God's law for our rule, God's Son for our pattern, God's love for our motive, God's glory and approbation for our end and aim. Christ's people are peculiar in living unto God, in keeping him always before their eyes, in giving him the first place in their thoughts, in making it their chief study and delight to please him. Above all, they are peculiar in setting their hearts, not on anything which this world can bestow, but on the blessed prospect of living, after death, with Christ and God. These are the things which Christ's people are peculiar in: these, in other

words, are the marks of the true Christian. In proportion as a person has these divine marks in him, in the same proportion is he a true Christian. But if so, the man who professes to do as others do, and to take the world for his guide and model, must be very far from being a true Christian. He may pass for a respectable and worthy man in the opinion of his fellows; but their opinion will stand him in little stead at the judgement-seat of his Lord. There the question will be, not what men thought of him, but what Christ thinks of him. He will be asked, not merely whether he was sober, and orderly, and honest, according to the scant low measure which the decencies of the world require; but whether he was in all points a follower of his crucified Master, to the best of his means and power. This is the question we shall be asked there: therefore this is the question which, if we are wise, we shall be careful to ask ourselves here. We should each say to himself, What answer shall I be able to make, when Christ asks me this searching question? or what will it profit me to gain the praise of men, if I draw down the condemnation of God? In speaking about this class of persons, assuredly I have spoken too favorably, when I have called them half leavened. The leaven has not worked its way into their hearts: it has not worked its way

into their daily life and conduct. Therefore their Christianity in the eye of God is only so much outside show. There is none of the pulp or juice in them: their religion is merely rind and parings.

But, as it is not enough to be half leavened, neither is it enough for us to be only three parts leavened. The whole must be leavened. I call those persons three parts leavened, who are truly religious in the main. They have a strong sense of their duty to God, a strong sense of their duty to their neighbour: they act more or less from a religious principle: they are diligent in reading the word of God: they often help the poor: they are anxious for the conversion of Turks and Jews and heathens: they like to hear of what is doing by the Missionaries, who are preaching Christ in foreign countries: and they are ready to give their mite toward furthering so good a work. What then do they lack? Why they lack, if they have nothing more than this, the all-pervading leaven of the Gospel. The yeast has worked in them, and worked well: but still there are often parts in such people, which are not yet quite leavened. I will instance the temper and the tongue. I know not why it is, that sourness and tartness of temper are so often complained of in religious people. It may be,

the world is on the watch against such persons, and takes count of failings in them, which in others pass unnoticed. It may be, that, among those who are religious, many have been led to religion by sickness or by age; and sickness and age do not improve the temper. It may be, that, in order to become religious, they have had to fight many hard battles with their own hearts: they may have had much reason to be dissatisfied with themselves for their slow progress in holiness: perhaps they have suffered vexation and persecution from their less religious friends and neighbours and relations: and all these things are likely to hurt and sour the temper. But whatever be the reason, certain it is that religious people are charged with being harsh, and even uncharitable in temper, oftener than with any other fault.

Another fault not seldom found in religious persons is an unruly tongue. Not that they are more guilty on this score than others: on the contrary they are less so. Still it is a fault they are often guilty of: and it is one of those spots which one does not much heed, when the whole character is ungodly, but which looks very black and ugly on the whiteness of a Christian's coat. By unruliness of tongue I do not of course mean those grosser sins of swearing or of slandering: such things can never come from a Christian's

mouth: I mean all that idle tattling about our neighbour's business, which is commonly called gossiping. This gossiping has been too frequent a fault among Christians, even from the earliest times: for we find St Paul reproving the tattlers and busybodies, who wander about from house to house, speaking things which they ought not.

These two kinds of faults then,—or let me rather call them plainly sins, sins of the temper, and sins of the tongue,—are often met with in those who are only three parts leavened. Now when such persons are aware of these sins of theirs, if they grieve over them, and strive against them, and pray to God to enable them to keep a better guard over their tongues and tempers, the leaven is still working in their hearts; and we may hope that with the help of the Holy Spirit they may go on still further toward perfection. But too often this is not the case. Too often persons sit down satisfied with the progress they have already made, and measure themselves with the ungodly, instead of measuring themselves by Christ's perfect law. Too often they are content with being better than those about them, and think there can be no great harm in being a little fretful, or a little sullen at times, or in speaking a little harshly of a neighbour, or in busying themselves with other people's

affairs. These and the like faults according to them are only natural infirmities, which there is little or no need to correct, and which God will not be quick to notice. Now this is a great mistake. God is not quick to mark those faults which we grieve over and fight against: on the contrary, he has promised to forgive all such, and to help us to get the better of them. But the moment we indulge ourselves in any one sin, and cease to strive against it, that moment it becomes a presumptuous sin: and no presumptuous sin is small. With regard to the particular faults in question, hear what St James says of the tongue: "If any one among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, he deceiveth his own heart, and his religion is vain." (i. 26.) Can this be a small fault, which is enough to make the whole of a man's religion good for nothing? So necessary is it to set a watch over our mouth, and to keep the door of our lips, lest we be guilty of offending with our words.

And as it behoves a Christian to put a bridle on his tongue, so must he do his best to put a bridle on his temper. Nor is it enough to bridle our tempers; we must also strive to change their nature. If ye be led of the Spirit, says St Paul, if ye are under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and sow to the Spirit; that is,

walk as Christ would have you, and cherish those graces and dispositions which belong to the children of God. And which are they? St Paul reckons them up in the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians: among them are love, joy, peace, gentleness, and meekness. Who then dares say of Christ's religion that it is a harsh, sour, unpleasant thing? It is not religion that makes men harsh and sour, but the want of it. The harshness and sourness only shew that the fruit is not yet ripe. Truly Christian tempers, those tempers which are thoroughly leavened by the Spirit, so far from being harsh and sour, are the sweetest and gentlest that can be seen. I speak from my own observation: for I have known some such persons myself, persons in whose company it was scarcely possible to be, without feeling that one was breathing the very air of Christ's kingdom. But if this perfection can be attained, every follower of Christ is bound to strive after it: and how far are they from the full growth of the Gospel, whose tempers and tongues are still unleavened! Truly, notwithstanding the progress they may have made, those who are only three parts leavened are still too far from the kingdom of God.

Thus have I described to you four classes of men, all calling themselves Christians, all perhaps

thinking themselves safe, and yet all coming far short of that total leavening, which alone proves the love and the fear of God to hold their rightful sway over a man's heart. Therefore it becomes each of us to ask ourselves very seriously, "Do I belong to any of these four classes? and to which of them? Have I such a practical sense of my duty to God, that I may venture to deem myself three parts leavened? Have I merely a sense of the seemliness of religion, and so am only half leavened? Have I nothing but a wish and a feeling about the matter? and am I only a quarter leavened? Or am I in that worst state of all, in which the leaven has not yet begun to work?" In one or other of these four states many of every congregation may assuredly be numbered. Let each of you ask himself, "In which of these states am I?" that, thus comparing what you are, with what you ought to be, you may be better enabled to set about correcting and amending what is amiss in you.

But perhaps some of you may be inclined to say, "Can a man be so very perfect as all this? Are no allowances to be made for the weakness of human nature?" I answer, a man can be as perfect as this; because many have been so. Nay many, I trust, who are as perfect as this, are now alive. And they would be the very first to tell

you, that even they need all the allowances, all the mercy, all the grace of Jesus Christ. They would be the first to tell you of themselves, "We feel how very far short we come of that perfection which Jesus has set before us: we feel how far short we fall of that command of his, Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." For this is the true standard, which we should set before us and endeavour to reach, the goodness and righteousness and lovingkindness and purity of God, as shewn to us in his blessed Son. That Son was the express image of his Father's excellency: so that the more we become like the Son, the more we shall be like the Father. But how is it possible for us to become like the Son of God, until our hearts, and minds, and words, and thoughts, and wishes, are fully leavened with the spirit of the Gospel, the spirit of holiness and love?

The only remaining question is, how are we to get this precious and all-hallowing leaven, which is to change the dross of our natures into gold? First, I would have you search for it in the New Testament. The words of Jesus and of his apostles are the true leaven, which you are to apply to your hearts. But it is not enough to put leaven to the flour, unless we also knead it into the flour, and mix them well together. So it is not enough to store our memories with the leaven of God's word, un-

less we work it thoroughly and diligently into our hearts, by self-examination and by prayer. The Bible and other godly books teach you what you ought to be: let self-examination shew you what you are: and then compare the two together. Some people have a dread of self-examination, as if it were a very difficult and frightful thing: and difficult it certainly is, if a person puts it off, until he finds that in a single day perhaps he has to reckon up the sins of years. But if you would practise it regularly, nothing can be easier. Is it not easy to ask oneself, when one goes to bed, "Have I prayed to God heartily, or thought of him all day? Have I behaved to my neighbour as I would have him behave to me? I made a bargain to-day with such a man: did I make it on such terms as I should have thought fair, had I been in his place? I had to do such a piece of work for my master: did I do it as I would have done it, had I been working for myself? I had a quarrel with such a one this morning: was the fault mine or his? Did I say anything to provoke him? Did I remember that a mild answer turneth away wrath? Was I slow to take offense, and quick to forgive it?"

Look thus at yourselves every night, my brethren, by the bright and piercing light of the Gospel. Carry the lamp of God's law in your hands,

and search through every corner of your hearts. Never lay your head on your pillow without doing so: for in this sense also most assuredly sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Cast your thoughts over what you have done, and compare it with what you ought to have done. Think what you have been, and then think what Christ was. After such an examination you will never be able to close your eyes, until you have fallen on your knees, and besought God to send his Holy Spirit, to circumcise what is still uncircumcised in you, and to leaven what is still unleavened.

SERMON X.

THE ANGELS TEXT.

LUKE ii. 14.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

SUCH was the text of the angels on the night of our Saviour's birth; and to that text our Saviour's life furnished the sermon. For it was a life of holiness and devotion to his Father's service, a life spent in doing good to the bodies and souls of all around him; and it was ended by a death undergone on purpose to reconcile man with God, and to set earth at peace with heaven. Here is a practical sermon on the angels text, the best of all sermons, a sermon not of words, but deeds. Whoever will duly study that practical sermon, whoever with a teachable, inquiring heart will study the accounts of our Saviour's words and actions handed down in the four Gospels, will

need little else to enlighten him in the way of godliness. Nevertheless, since it has pleased God that faith should come by hearing, and hearing by the multitude of preachers, I will say a few words to you on each of the heads into which this, the angels text, divides itself.

The first words of it are, Glory to God! and a most weighty lesson may we draw for ourselves, from finding the angels put that first. A world is redeemed. Millions on millions of human beings are rescued from everlasting death. Is not this the thing uppermost in the angels thoughts? Is not this mighty blessing bestowed on man the first thing that they proclaim? No, it is only the second thing: the first thing is, Glory to God! Why so? Because God is the giver of this salvation; nay, is himself the Saviour, in the person of the only-begotten Son. Moreover because in heavenly minds God always holds the first place, and they look at everything with a view to him. But if this was the feeling of the angels, it is clear we cannot be like angels, until the same feeling is uppermost with us also. Would we become like them, we must strive to do God's will; as it is done in heaven; that is, because it is God's will: and because we are fully persuaded that whatever he wills must needs be the wisest and best and rightest thing to do,

whether we can see the reasons of it or not. We must have God ever in our thoughts, just as most men have themselves ever in their thoughts. I do not mean that we should be always considering what God is like; any more than a selfish man is always considering what he himself is like. But the selfish man does everything with a view to self, to his own pleasure, to his own interest, to his own profit and convenience, and no more dreams of crossing his own wishes, or his own will, than of cutting and maiming his body. This, you must be well aware, is the way most men look to themselves. Now I would have you look to God exactly in the same manner. But why say, *I* would have you? The Bible would have you, Jesus Christ would have you, make a habit of trying to obey and to please God in everything, and thereby offering and devoting to him all your daily doings. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, you should do all to God's glory. Then will you be like the angels, who began their text with, Glory to God!

The next branch of the text is, Peace on earth. Our Saviour is especially called the Prince of Peace, because his great purposes were to bring down peace to man, and to plant and foster peace within man. He brought down peace to man; for he came with a message of free pardon

from the Father to proclaim that God was willing to reconcile the world to himself, and would not impute their trespasses to men, if they would only turn to him, and believe in him. Had not Jesus brought us this blessed message, he would not have been the Messiah. For it was prophesied of him in the Psalms, that he should speak peace to his people, and to his saints (lxxxv. 8); and again in the prophet Zechariah, "He shall speak peace to the heathen" (ix. 10); and more strongly still in that sublime passage of Isaiah, where the prophet says, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God: speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished." Here is a plain proclamation of peace: for the warfare is said to be accomplished, or to be at an end. But when war is over, peace begins. This however is not all. The prophet adds how the war was to end: "her iniquity is pardoned." From these last words we learn that the war is a war with God; and that he puts a stop to it by a pardon. Well then might the angels sing, Peace on earth! when He was appearing upon earth, who was the ambassador of peace with Heaven.

But Jesus was not content with proclaiming peace to man. He further made it one of his prime objects to plant and foster peace within

man. Peace was his legacy to his apostles. "My peace I leave with you," were his words to them the night he was betrayed. But what kind of peace? Truly every kind which man can enjoy: peace of conscience, such as a man enjoys, who knows his sins to be forgiven: peace of heart, such as a father may feel even in the hour of his bitterest sorrow, if he knows that the child, whom death has just taken away, is only sleeping, as the daughter of Jairus slept, and that Christ will hereafter come to wake him; peace of a mind at ease about worldly matters, such as befits persons who have been taught that only one thing is really needful to a reasonable and immortal spirit, that our heart and treasure should both be in heaven, and that, with regard to our earthly wants and wishes, everything here below is in the hands of God, who cares for us, has no pleasure in afflicting us, and has promised to make all things work together for our good, if we will only love and fear him; lastly, peace and union between brethren, that we may all make up one body under Jesus Christ our head.

This is the fourfold peace which our Saviour came to plant and foster in the hearts of men. Now let each of us ask himself with all seriousness, do I feel anything of this godly peace? Ask yourselves, for instance, whether you have the

peace arising out of the humble hope that your sins are pardoned. But remember, it is impossible to arrive at this, without being first convinced of sin. He that knows not the danger and the misery of being at war with God, will not feel the blessedness of being at peace with him. Ask yourselves again, whether you have the peace of heart and mind growing out of a thorough trust in God through Christ. Do you look to him, as a child looks to its parent, for the fulfilment of all your wishes? When he thwarts you, do you bow down? When he chastens you, do you kiss the rod? When he blesses you, do you ascribe the blessing to the only Author of every good gift? When he takes away some object of earthly love, which has struck its roots so deep into you, it tears your very heart to part with it, do you,—instead of weakly sinking under the blow, or proudly hardening yourself against it,—do you meekly sorrow over it, with a patient and hopeful sorrow, like men who know that the spirits of such as die in the Lord are blessed; and that it is good for the departed to be taken away, though it is bitter for the surviver to be left behind?

There is still another kind of peace, concerning which you should examine yourselves: I mean, peace and union with your christian brethren. Let each ask himself whether he feels anything of

that. It is no common good-fellowship, it is no weak tie, that will suffice. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves: so says Christ. We are to love him, not in word only, but in deed and in truth: so says St John. We are to be one with our christian brethren, so as all to make up one family. Nay, this is not enough. St Paul's words are still stronger: he would have us all be as it were one body, one in interests, one in affections, one in heart and mind and soul and spirit. This can only be brought about by our emptying ourselves of ourselves, that the love of Christ may flow into us, and fill us all with the same affections and desires. Have we thus emptied ourselves? But it is useless to ask the question. Of course we have not. This is the last and highest step toward christian perfection, which a man is allowed to take here below: and of course we have not taken it. But have we ever so much as made the attempt? Have we ever begun to fight against our own selfishness? Have we ever determined to deny ourselves, to mortify ourselves, to esteem others better than ourselves, to look not only to our own feelings and interests, but also to those of others? Have we ever begun to seek this peace and union, far as we may be from having attained to it?

If we have not done so, if our hearts cannot

bear us true witness that we have any of these different kinds of peace within us, what share have we in Christ's coming? What good is it to us that peace on earth has been proclaimed, if we are still lying under God's wrath, still a prey to eating cares, still tossed about and torn by raging passions, so that our hearts are full of war? The same holy book, which tells us in one place that the angels proclaimed peace on earth, tells us likewise in another place, "there is no peace, saith God, to the wicked." Yet, brethren, though Christ may have failed on all former occasions to bring home peace to some of you, let him not fail of doing so now. He has come to you once more to-day. Once more have we been permitted to hear the story of his birth, the message of the angels, the song of the heavenly choir. We have followed the shepherds to the humble stable; and our souls have looked on the wondrous babe, the Son of God, the Maker of the world, lying, where none of you would suffer a child of yours to lie, among the cattle in a manger, and all to bring us peace. Will you again refuse the precious gift, which he has come from beyond the stars to offer you? Accept it this time for his sake, for your own sakes. Begin now, whatever you may have done heretofore, to seek his peace, and to pursue it.

There is a third part of the angels text,—namely, "Goodwill to men:" and a very important part it is. For it sets forth the ground of our salvation. It was no excellency or merit of ours, that drew our Saviour down from heaven: for we were full of nothing but demerits. It was the wretchedness of our fallen state, the seeing how impossible it was for us ever to recover by our own strength, that moved Almighty God in his infinite lovingkindness to send his Son to rescue and redeem us. He saw that there was none to save: therefore his own arm, the arm of God, brought us salvation; the righteousness of God was manifested to sustain us. Well then might the angels proclaim goodwill to man at Christ's birth; since his birth was so great and wonderful a shewing forth of God's goodwill to us. For herein, as St Paul tells us, "God commendeth, or sheweth forth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. v. 8.) To the same purport are the words of St John: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John iv. 10.)

But though this love of God for his sinful creatures is worthy of all gratitude and praise, the goodwill declared in the angels text means something more than mere love. The word, which we

translate goodwill, is a word very full of meaning, and signifies that mixture of goodness and kindness and wisdom, which leads to good and wise plans. The goodwill then in the angels text is no other than the great and merciful purpose of our redemption: and had one of the angels enlarged on the text, we may conceive him expressing himself after the following manner. "This night, O man, is our Father and your Father carrying into effect that wonderful plan, which he has prepared ever since the fall of Adam. The prophecy to Adam, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head,—the prophecy to Abraham, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed,—the prophecy of Malachi, that the Sun of Righteousness should arise with healing on his wings,—these and all the other prophecies which speak of the Messiah's coming, are now fulfilled. The eternal counsels of the Lord are now about to take effect. His faithfulness, his truth, his righteousness, his mercy are coming down from heaven to dwell among men, that men may see with their bodily eyes, and hear with their bodily ears, the goodness of their Father and their God, who has brought to light a marvellous way of reconciling his justice with his mercy, and of proving himself the eternal and implacable enemy of sin, at the very moment when he is most

forgiving to repentant sinners. It is this union of goodness, of wisdom, and of mercy, that we now proclaim and announce to you, under the name of goodwill to men."

Now to apply this part of the angels text to ourselves, have we any proper sense and feeling of this goodwill? If we have, we shall be humble; inasmuch as we are saved, not by our merits, but by the love of God, in spite of our manifold demerits. We shall be thankful; for surely kindness like this ought to fill our hearts with gratitude. .God's love toward us should beget in us love toward him. Above all, we should be full of faith, trusting that he who has begun so excellent a work, will bring the same to good effect,—that he who for our sakes gave his only Son to live a poor and humble life, and to die a painful and shameful death, will together with that Son freely give us all things. We cannot suppose it was a pleasure to the Son of God to suffer the pains of infancy, the labours and mortifications and trials of manhood, the pangs of a cruel death. It was no pleasure to him to quit the glories of heaven, in order to dwell in lowliness and contempt. Why then did he undergo all this? From goodwill, to save man? And think you he will leave this salvation imperfect, and so render his incarnation, and birth, and human life and death, of no avail?

O no! he must desire to finish his work; he must be anxious to make up the crown he has toiled and bled for, by placing in it all the jewels, all the souls he can gather. He will never be wanting to us, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

Thus have I spoken to you on the angels text, and in so doing have spoken of man's salvation. The end of the whole is God's glory; the means is peace on earth; the sole motive is goodness and lovingkindness to us miserable sinners. But there are still three words in the text, which I have not noticed. The angels did not simply say, Glory to God; but Glory to God *in the highest*, that is, in heaven. Here is a wonderful, a glorious, a soul-sustaining scene opened to us. The angels in the very presence of God are moved by our sufferings and our redemption. 'Even to them, with all their knowledge of God, and his divine works, even to them, that the Word should stoop to be made flesh, unfolded new views of the eternal Father's goodness, and furnished a fresh theme for their songs of praise. Even the angels strike their golden harps at the joyful news of man's salvation. Shall they glorify God for his goodness to us? and shall we forget to glorify him for his goodness to ourselves? Shall they rejoice over us, and feel for us? and shall we be so insensible, so deaf-hearted, as neither to rejoice nor to feel for

ourselves,—for our escape from sin and hell,—for our restoration to the hope of heaven? Our Saviour threatened the impenitent Jews, that the men of Nineveh should rise up in judgement against them, and condemn them. A more glorious and awful set of witnesses, if we are impenitent, will be arrayed against us Christians. The very angels will testify against us, and condemn us: because, when they had proclaimed glory to God in the highest, he was forgotten and dishonoured among men; because, when they had announced the coming of peace on earth, men rejected the blessed offer, and remained at enmity with God, and with themselves, and with each other; because, when they had assured us of goodwill from God to men, our bosoms did not echo the answering cry of love and gratitude and obedience from man to God. Brethren, may none of us be among the wretched multitude, against whom this testimony will be offered! Let us bethink ourselves in time, and be reconciled to God in time, that, as Jesus on this day brought the Godhead down from heaven to earth, so, by the work of his Spirit on our willing and obedient hearts, he may raise us up from earth to heaven.

SERMON XI.

THE EPIPHANY;

OR,

FAR AND NIGH.

EPHESIANS ii. 12, 13.

At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

THESE words were spoken by St Paul to the converts he had made at Ephesus, who, before he preached to them, and brought them to a knowledge of the truth, were in the miserable state here described. They were without Christ: they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel: they were strangers from the covenants of promise: they were without hope, and without God. This was their wretched plight, so long as they were far

off. But through the grace of God, who was pleased to send his servant Paul to declare the gospel of salvation to them, their condition underwent a wonderful change. They were made nigh by the blood of Christ. By that blood they were reconciled to God: they were made partakers in the covenant of promise, fellow-citizens with the saints, became entitled to all the glorious privileges of God's people, and were admitted to dwell in his house, and to share in the blessings and honours of his family.

It is of this marvellous and happy change, that St Paul reminds the Ephesians in the text. To make them feel their blessedness as Christians, he sets before them their wretchedness as Gentiles, or heathens; when, as we read in the book of Acts, they were worshippers of the great goddess Diana, and of the statue which in their fond conceits they imagined to have fallen from heaven: that is, they were blind idolaters, and bowed down to gods that were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Nor was this the case with the people of Ephesus alone, before the coming of Christ. The Jews indeed had been favoured from the earliest times with a knowledge of the one true God: and through their teaching in almost every great city there was a congregation, larger or smaller, of devout men, or proselytes, as

they were called, who had left the idols of their fathers, and worshipt the great Jehovah. But with these exceptions the whole earth was lying dead in darkness and in wickedness. Even the city of Athens, which among the heathens passed for the light of the world, was wholly given up to idolatry. The account which we read in the Epistle to the Romans applied, under one form or other, to all the Gentiles: "they had changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and even to creeping things." Their souls were bound to the footstool of any dumb idol that chance had set up among them.

Why do I speak of these things to you? For the same reason which led St Paul to speak of them to the Ephesians: to remind you of the fearful depths of evil, out of which through God's mercy you have been brought, that your hearts may be stirred to thankfulness, and that, feeling how much you owe to God for his goodness, you may be roused to do your best toward paying off your great debt of love to him, by giving yourselves up to his service, and striving to walk before him in holiness and righteousness. For we too are not of the seed of Abraham after the flesh: we too by birth are Gentiles, as the Ephesians were: and if the mercy of God had

not been revealed to our forefathers, as well as to them,—if our forefathers, having sometimes been far off, had not been made nigh by the blood of Christ,—we at this day should still be what they were, and what so many millions of idolaters in all quarters of the world are even now: we should be aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise: we should be without hope, and without God, even in the midst of God's own world. But, blessed be God! it pleased him to call our fathers to the knowledge of the truth in Christ Jesus. Nay, it has pleased him to enrich them with one spiritual blessing after another, and to exalt them with religious privileges and religious knowledge, not merely above the heathens, but, I might almost say, above every other christian people. Moreover they have been allowed to hand down those religious privileges, a rich and precious inheritance, the richest and most precious of all earthly inheritances, to us, their children; and we are now enjoying them. At least it is our own fault, our own sin, if we are not.

Thoughts of this kind can never be out of season; for it can never be out of season to meditate on the great mercies that God has vouchsafed to us. But they are more especially fitted for the festival we are this day celebrating. To-day

is the feast of the Epiphany, as it is called, that is, of the manifestation or shewing forth,—a feast kept in remembrance of that great and glorious day, when Christ was first manifested and shewn to the Gentiles. In the Gospel for the day we read how it pleased God, by means of a wonderful star, to make the birth of Jesus known to the wise men, and how they came from their own country in the East to Jerusalem, and how the words on their lips, when they got there, were "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him." Nor did they come empty-handed. According to the prophecy in the 72nd Psalm, that the kings of Arabia and Saba should bring gifts, they had brought the riches of those very countries, which abound in gold and spices, to offer to the new-born King. And where, and how did they find him? In a splendid palace, in the midst of a mighty city, surrounded by guards, with the lords and ladies of the land taking pride in waiting upon him? He was in a small house, in the petty village of Bethlehem, with nobody to nurse or tend him but his virgin mother. Had they arrived a little sooner, they would have found him, as the shepherds did, in a stable. But probably some kind-hearted person had been moved with pity for the Virgin's forlorn condition, and

had taken her in with her babe: for we read, that, when the wise men came to the spot over which the star stood still, they went into the house, and saw—what?—only a young child, with its mother, holding it in her arms, or sitting by it, and perhaps praying over it, with the humble anxious fervour of a pious mother's prayer. Now was the time when the wise men shewed themselves to be most truly wise. They were wise, after the wisdom of their own country, when they were standing night after night on their watch-tower, following the stars in their glorious courses. They were wise, when, at the sight of the new star,—which reminded them, it may be, of the great prophecy uttered by Balaam, that a star should come out of Jacob, and a sceptre should rise out of Israel,—they undertook a long and weary journey to offer their homage to the promised king. But wise as they were at the beginning of their journey, their wisdom shone still brighter at the end of it. They shewed the greatest wisdom,—because they shewed the greatest faith,—when they had reached the house and entered in. How many would have been scandalized and shocked at the mean appearance of the infant! How many would have been troubled with doubts, and would have begun to say within themselves, "Surely there must be some mistake here: this child can never be born

a king!" How many again would have felt their pride hurt, and would have been half angry, half ashamed, at having taken such a long journey to see a poor child in a cottage! But the wise men felt none of this false pride, none of this false shame. They knew that they might trust the star: the star and its Maker could not lie. Therefore they trusted it to the utmost, notwithstanding that all which met their eyes would have led them to think its tidings could not be true. When they saw it stop over a cottage at Bethlehem, mean as the place was, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy; and when they were come in, and saw the young child, with Mary his mother, they fell down,—these princes and wise men fell down in the lowliness of their wisdom;—and although he whom they beheld was reputed to be nothing more than the son of a carpenter, yet under his form they worshipt the Saviour and the Maker of the world. "And they opened their treasures, and presented gifts to him, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh;" thereby fulfilling the prophecy in the 72nd Psalm, that "to him shall be given of the gold of Arabia," and that, which you heard in the lesson from Isaiah, that "they from Sheba shall bring gold and incense."

But to return to the main subject of my sermon: why is the story of these wise men of such interest

and importance to us, that the Church has thought fit that a day in every year should be set apart to keep alive the memory of Christ's manifestation to them? Because, in manifesting himself to the wise men, Our Saviour manifested himself to the Gentiles. They were the first-fruits of the Gentile world, who came to the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. Therefore, in rejoicing, as the Church does on this day, that God was pleased by the leading of a star to manifest Jesus to the Gentiles, we should likewise feel a thankful joy that he was manifested to our forefathers, and through them has been made known to us. We should bear in mind that we have had Christ shewn to us, not in his cradle, but, I might almost say, in our own cradles. Almost from our cradles upward have we been taught to know Christ, and to love him. We have had no toilsome journey to take in search of him: he is near to us, even at our very doors. We have had no questions to ask, like the wise men, when they came to Jerusalem, in order to find out the King of the Jews. Go east, or west, or north, or south, into every corner of this favoured land; in every parish you will find a church, and in thousands of cottages you will find New Testaments, to shew you the plain straight way to Jesus, the King of the world. Nor is our faith put to the trial of seeing our King in the guise of

a poor infant. The same book, which tells us that Jesus was laid in a manger, and brought up under the roof of a village carpenter, tells us also that he was the image of the invisible God, that he was the first-born before every creature, and that, as a recompense for his taking our nature upon him, and submitting to the death of the cross, God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that at his name every knee should bow, not only in earth, but in heaven also, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. ii. 9, 10). All these things we have heard from our very childhood. Christ has never been made known to us, except as a Prince and a Saviour, who came down to earth for a time on the errand of our redemption, but whose true and right home is heaven, where he is now sitting at the right hand of God.

Is it a small thing, my brethren, to have had all this revealed to us? Remember, "many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which we see, and have not seen them." (Matt. xiii. 17.) Yet to us they have been made known from the hour when we began to talk. Without our seeking, they have come to us. They have been forced upon us. We could not shut our eyes and ears to them if we would. Is it a small

thing to have been made nigh to God, by the blood of his only Son? we, whose fathers at one time were far off, and neither knew God, nor wished to know him. Just think for a few moments, out of what a state we have been delivered, by being called to the knowledge of our God and Saviour, —by being born here, in this Christian Protestant land, instead of under heathen darkness.

We should have been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. It has pleased Almighty God to set up a spiritual kingdom upon earth, and to make gracious promises to all the people of his kingdom, that is, to every member of his Church. He has entered into a covenant with them by sacrifice, even by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Now would it not be a misery to have been shut out from God's earthly kingdom? to have no share in God's promises? to be excluded from the covenant which he has made with his people and his servants? Would not this be a grievous misery? My belief is, that we cannot in this life fathom all the depths of this misery. We know, and may understand, how much worse it is to be born a slave, than to be born free,—how much worse it must be to be born a savage, than to come into life and be bred up in a civilized, orderly, quiet land. This we may all of us in some measure understand.

But the woe it would be to a man to be born a heathen, instead of a Christian, we cannot fully make out, until we are let in to see the secrets of eternity.

Still there are two things mentioned by St Paul, which may give us some notion of the wretched forlorn state of such as are far off without Christ. He tells us, that they are without hope, and without God. So too should we have been, if we had been born heathens. If the star of the Gospel had not shone in the eyes of our fathers, and called them to worship Christ, we too should have been born without hope and without God. Now cast in your minds, how much would you strike off from every good man's happiness, if you took away his hope and his God from him. Surely there is no one here, who, however faulty his practice may be, would consent to part with his hope, and to give up his knowledge of God, that he might go and be a king among the heathens. So that the poorest man in a christian land is infinitely better off than the richest and most powerful in the countries where Christ is not known. For they who are far off and without Christ, are doomed to live without those hopes, which are far more precious than the crown of a king, and without that knowledge of God, which is far mightier than the sceptre of a king. Being

without Christ, they are without God. For it is only through Christ that we can come to God, even to know him, much more to love him, and to obey him. All who are without Christ must needs be without God. And what is man without God? He is like a ship tossed about on a stormy sea, without chart or compass. The ship drifts as the waves carry it: the night is dark: the pilot knows not which way to steer: he may be close to rocks and quicksands: perhaps a flash of lightning falls on a rock, or he hears the waves breaking over it. But how shall he escape? or how prepare to meet the danger? Shall he trust in Providence? What Providence has he to trust in? Poor man! he is without God. Shall he throw out an anchor? But he has no anchor: he wants the best and only fast anchor,—hope, the anchor of the soul. Such is the state of man, when he is far off, without a God to trust in, without hope to comfort and support him. But give the same man a true and lively faith in Christ,—tell him of a merciful and loving Father, who careth for us, and would have us cast all our cares upon him,—shew him that hope which is firm to the end; and straightway you make a happy man of him. You give him a course to steer; you give him a chart and compass to guide him; you give him an anchor which will enable him to withstand the buffeting of every

storm: you insure him against shipwreck; and you assure him of a blessed haven, where at length he will arrive and be at rest.

Such is a slight outline of the difference between Gentiles, or heathens, and Christians,—between those who are far off, and those who are nigh: or rather, to speak more correctly and more profitably, such may be the difference between them. But as, in receiving the body and blood of Christ, the danger is declared to be great, if we receive the same unworthily, so is it with the privileges of the christian covenant. The danger attending them is likewise great, if we receive them unthankfully and unworthily,—if we put them to a bad use, or to no use,—if, being born nigh to Christ, we choose to depart from him like the Prodigal Son into a far country,—if, bearing the name of Christ, we live the life of heathens.

The danger, if we live thus, is great. For in so living we are guilty of the body and blood of Christ our Saviour. It is by the blood of Christ, the apostle expressly says, that we are made nigh. If then, having been bought at such a price, and brought out of a world where we were without God, to the very foot of God's throne, we throw away the inestimable advantages thus vouchsafed to us,—if we run off from the foot of God's throne, and go and hide ourselves in one of those

caverns of sin which are yawning on every side of us,—do we not shew that we neither prize the privileges obtained for us, nor regard the price which Jesus paid for them? Assuredly we thereby prove that we think no more of the blood of Christ, wherewith we have been sanctified, than if it were so much common blood. We prove, to use the awful language of the apostle, that we count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. (Heb. x. 29.)

Such behaviour moreover is utterly inexcusable. The heathen may plead that he has rarely, if ever, heard of Christ, and that, having been bred up in a different religion, he had many strong prejudices to fight against and overcome, before he could embrace the Gospel: and these pleas, so far as they are brought forward in sincerity, God, we may be sure, will mercifully listen to. The heathen, I say, may plead this excuse. But we,—what excuse have we to plead? we, who have been born beneath the full sunshine of Gospel truth,—we, who have been bred up, as it were, in the innermost chamber of God's earthly temple,—we, who have been mercifully placed within the skirts of Christ's glory. What excuse can we plead for not believing in him, for not loving him, for not obeying him? You cannot,—none of you can plead ignorance. In the New Testa-

ment you have the best teachers that ever lived, the Son of God himself, and his chosen apostles. You have had the Scriptures read to you, you have had them explained to you, from your very childhood; and they contain the words of eternal life. Ignorance then you can in no wise plead: for none need be ignorant, unless they choose it. Will any of you plead your small capacity? your want of opportunity? To ensure you plenty of opportunity, God has kept one day for himself out of every seven, on purpose that the very busiest, that even those who are forced to work all day long for their bread, may have an abundance of time for learning to know his will. As for dullness of understanding, it is not a sharp or strong head that is wanted to make a Christian, but a sincere and honest heart. Only be earnest in seeking the true and right way: you will have no difficulty in finding it.

But perhaps you will say that your nature is weak, and prone to sin. True, most true, it is so: and therefore the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, has deigned to promise that he will come down from heaven to us, and dwell with us, and strengthen us against all our infirmities. However weak we may be in ourselves, surely he can make us strong enough. Away then with all such excuses! Those who do not serve Christ in

this country, do not, because they will not. He has called them,—time after time he has called them;—but they will not come. He has placed them near him: but they will not stay. They will not accept eternal life from him on the gracious terms on which he has offered it. No, they cry in their madness, let us have hell instead. No, they still cry, when Christ is set before them, we will not have this man to reign over us. Our lusts shall reign over us; our vices shall reign over us; our enmities shall reign over us; covetousness shall reign over us: there is nothing so paltry, so vile, so foul, so hateful, but we will set it up to be our king, rather than the King of heaven. What is this but sinning with our eyes open? What is it but crucifying the Son of God, and not the Son of man? What is it but saying, like the Jews, Not Jesus, but Barabbas?

My brethren, it is an awful thing to slight the gifts, and to trample on the blessings of the living God. As sure as God liveth, it shall not be done for ever with impunity. He has chosen us Englishmen, as he chose the Jews of old: he has given us a birthright in the commonwealth of Israel: he has bound himself to us by the covenant of promise: he has made us nigh by the blood of his Son. He has enriched us with every opportunity of learning his will. He has ordained that

no hand of man shall hinder us in doing it. He has scattered the seed of his word through the land with an abundance elsewhere unheard of. Blessed be his name for all his blessings to us! If we despise them however, if we turn our backs on them, if we defile the blood of the covenant, by mingling it with our sacrifices to the idols of our lusts,—God's judgements on Jerusalem will then be but a weak type of his more fearful judgements upon us: upon us, I say,—upon you, and me, and whosoever may be guilty of refusing this great salvation. Therefore, my beloved brethren, do not reject the proffered mercies of your God, which, being rejected, turn to curses. But put them to a right use. Make them the seeds and the forerunners of still greater blessings, which he is waiting and longing to bestow on you. As you have been brought nigh to Christ, strive daily to come nearer and nearer to him; nor slacken your efforts until you have become one with him in his heavenly glory.

SERMON XII.

REPENTANCE.

GENESIS XIX. 17.

Escape for thy life: escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed.

THERE is a time to laugh, says the Preacher; and there is also a time to weep. This we all know to be true with regard to the affairs of this world. Among the events that befall us in the course of our lives, there are some that make the heart glad, and others that wring it with anguish. So too in our spiritual life, in the matters that concern our souls, are there seasons for godly joy, and seasons likewise for godly sorrow. For many are the engines which God sets at work in order to bring us to him. Sometimes he draws us toward him with the cords of love, which have mostly the strongest hold on gentle spirits. At other times he sends judgements and visitations of various kinds to warn

us, that a wholesome fear may be wrought in our minds, and that we may flee in time from the wrath to come. When we look at what God has done and is ever doing for us, at the many marvellous proofs of his mercy, the many glorious offers of salvation set before us, we may well be joyful in the Lord, and serve him with gladness. When on the other hand we turn our eyes inward, and consider how we have behaved toward God,—when we think of the deaf ear we have so often turned to those offers of salvation, of the stubbornness with which we have shut our eyes against those proofs of mercy,—our sins and our ingratitude may well cover us with sorrow and shame.

Hence it is right and fitting that we should have seasons set apart more especially for spiritual joy, when our chief employment may be thanksgiving to God for all that he has done for us, and seasons for spiritual sorrow, wherein we may confess our sins, and mourn over them, and repent of them. Therefore the Church has appointed set times, when, as the year rolls round, these duties are to be brought solemnly before us. One great season for holy joy and thanksgiving is Christmas, which we have lately past through. The chief season for sorrow and repentance is Lent, on which we are now entering. Such then being the purpose of the Church in ordaining that the

forty days of Lent should be observed in a particular manner,—repentance being the feeling which she designs should at this season be uppermost in the hearts of her members,—it behoves us to consider what repentance is, and why it is of such importance, that so large a portion of every year should be set apart for it.

What then is repentance? You will perhaps tell me, it is the being sorry for having done wrong. This however is far from enough. The apostle speaks of "a godly sorrow, which worketh repentance:" so that repentance must be something different from sorrow, even from a godly sorrow. It is the fruit of a godly sorrow. When there is anything about us, that afflicts us and makes us grieve, we naturally wish, if possible, to be quit of it; and the more grievous our affliction, the stronger is our desire to get rid of that which causes it. Accordingly, if we are stirred with a hearty and godly sorrow for having turned away from God, and given ourselves up to sin, we must needs desire to forsake our sins, and to turn from them to God. This, at the very least, is necessary to make up anything that can claim to be called repentance. When the angel came to Lot in Sodom, what did he tell him? To grieve over the sins of Sodom? Had Lot done no more than this, he would have perished in the

destruction of Sodom. The angel bad him flee out of Sodom, and escape for his life: he bad him flee to the mountain, lest he should be consumed. He who sincerely and heartily repents of his sins, will not be content to tarry in the midst of them, nor even in the plain in their neighbourhood: he will endeavour to escape to the mountain; he will strive to climb up God's hill, the holy hill of Sion. It is a very common, and a very sad mistake, for people to fancy that, when they are sorry for their sins, when they abuse sin, and condemn it, and regret that they have fallen into it, they are repenting. But it is not so. We may speak ill of a thing with our lips; and yet our hearts may cleave to it all the while. So long as we continue in sin, so long at least as we do not strive to get out of it, there is no jot of true repentance in our hearts. For the repentance which is wrought by a godly sorrow, is a repentance unto salvation: but a repentance which did not move us to forsake our sins, would be a repentance unto destruction. We should be destroyed along with them, even as Lot would have been destroyed if he had staid in Sodom. Hear what the prophet Isaiah says, when he is exhorting the people to repentance. "Wash you; make you clean; put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil; learn to do well" (i. 16). In like manner John the Baptist, when he preached

repentance, laid the stress of his sermon on the fruits of repentance. It was not enough, he said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, to come and be baptized, and to confess their sins: they were also to bring forth fruits meet for repentance: for every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit,—I pray you, brethren, mark his words: he does not say, every tree which brings forth bad fruit, but every tree which does not bring forth good fruit,—every barren tree, every tree that bears nothing, is to be cut down, just as much as the vine spoken of by the prophet, which brought forth wild and poisonous grapes. Both are to be hewn down by the axe of justice: both are to be cast into the fire.

Indeed the very words in the original, which in our Bible are rendered by the English words *repent* and *repentance*,—the very words by which the Evangelists describe the preaching of the Baptist, and that of our Lord himself,—mean far more than is usually understood by the English words that answer to them. The original word means a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of thought and of feeling. Therefore, when you read or hear any of our Saviour's gracious promises of forgiveness to those who will repent, you must understand them as applying solely to those who have begun to lay aside their old thoughts about sin, and to look at it, not according

to the evil customs of the world, but according to the law of God. So long as a man asks, "What great harm can there be in this or that thing?" when God has forbidden it; so long as he says, "I am very sorry for what I do, but I can't help it;" —so long as he comforts himself with the thought that he is no worse than other men;—so long is he only deceiving himself to his ruin, by applying Christ's promises of forgiveness to his own case. Christ's promises are to those whose minds are changed. Is that man's mind changed, who does not see the great harm, the shame, the guilt, the danger of disobeying God? Is that man's mind changed, who says he cannot help his sins? when Jesus Christ came from heaven on purpose to bring him help, and to enable him to live unto righteousness. As for that habit of comparing ourselves with other men, and comforting ourselves if we find that we are not worse than they, among all the deadly snares which Satan is ever setting for souls, hardly any is more destructive, hardly any catches more victims, and entangles them in sin and death, than this very temptation by which he beguiles us into measuring ourselves among ourselves, and comparing ourselves one with another, instead of trying our lives and actions by the only true test, the word of God. In a word, unless we are heartily desirous to for-

sake sin,—and to forsake it too on right grounds, not because it may hurt our welfare in this world, but because it is hateful to God,—unless we do our best to flee from sin, it is a mere pretence to say that we repent. There may be momentary pangs of sorrow; there may be stings of remorse; there may be a fear of punishment: but, unless the remorse makes us hate sin, unless the fear makes us turn to God, unless the sorrow settles down into an earnest desire of leading pure and righteous lives in future, we are not among the number of those who have given heed to the cry calling them to repentance; and it will be no blessing to us that the kingdom of heaven is come.

This brings me to consider why we are to repent. Not on account of any pleasure or satisfaction found in the work of repentance itself. I will not conceal from you that the duty of repentance is neither easy nor pleasant. The very name given to the first day of Lent shews that this was not designed to be a season for gladness. It is called, as you know, Ash Wednesday; because on that day the Christians in former ages used to sprinkle their heads and cross their foreheads with ashes, saying one to another, "Remember, O man, that thou art ashes, and unto dust thou shalt return." To cover the head with ashes was regarded of old as a mark of the deepest sorrow.

Thus we read that Tamar in her grievous affliction put ashes on her head. Thus, when the wicked Haman had persuaded Ahasuerus to send forth a decree against the Jews, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes: and in every province there was great mourning among the Jews, fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. In like manner, when Jonah preached repentance to the people of Nineveh, the king arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And you cannot but remember our Saviour's words, in which he cries, "Wo to Chorazin! and wo to Bethsaida! for, if the mighty works done in them had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Thus has repentance ever been deemed a thing sad and painful and humiliating; and thus, when we repent, must we too, like the king of Nineveh, strip off all the pride of our nature, all that the flesh and the eye delight in, to cast ourselves on the ground, and to cover ourselves with the bitter ashes of our former pleasures. Nor does our blessed Master ever speak of repentance except as a thing hard to flesh and blood. You remember his words about John the Baptist, the great preacher of repentance: "What went ye out to see? a man

clothed in soft raiment? Behold they that wear soft clothing are in kings houses." The preacher of repentance is not among those who wear soft clothing. His dwelling is in the wilderness; and they who give heed to his preaching, must also go forth into the wilderness. They must deny all that they have hitherto been accustomed to pamper, and must forsake all wherewith they have hitherto pampered themselves. They must curb their tempers: they must fortify their inclinations: they must be content to fare without the comforts and indulgences to which they have been used all their lives. Pains must be taken, sacrifices must be made, by all who would enter in at the strait gait. Restraints must be borne, self-denial must be practised, by all who desire to recover from the deadly disease of sin. It can hardly be necessary to remind you, what a tedious work it is to recover from a severe and dangerous illness,—what a long time it takes,—how much care is needed to keep us from falling back, and losing the little ground we have gained. In how many ways is the sick man compelled to deny himself! for instance, in abstaining wholly from strong drinks, and from certain meats, which, when he was well, did him no harm, but which will not suit his present weakly state. The remedies too are often painful, the medicines distasteful. All this care and

abstinence the sick man may have to practise for months, until he has regained his strength. Nor is the recovery of the soul less difficult than that of the body: on the contrary it is far more difficult, inasmuch as the malady is of far longer standing. It is far more difficult: it takes a longer time: it is still more liable to be interrupted by relapses: it requires a still more watchful self-restraint and self-denial.

The likeness between the diseases of the body and those of the soul will also supply us with an answer to the question which I put just now: why, if repentance be so painful, are we to repent? Were a man, who was lying on a bed of sickness, to be asked, why he sent for a physician,—why he took so much nauseous medicine,—why he did not eat and drink like other men,—would he be at a loss for an answer? Would he not say at once, "Because I wish to live, rather than to die; so I am taking the only means whereby I can hope to save my life?" Such should be the penitent sinner's answer, when asked why he is taking the bitter medicine of repentance. This question is very likely to be put to him at the outset, by his passions, which are not used to be checked,—by his will, which grows outrageous at being curbed,—by his former companions, who are vexed to see him quitting, and thereby condemning them,—by

every evil thing in short both within him and around him. When such a question is asked him, he too should answer, "Because I wish to live, rather than to die, to live for ever, rather than to die for ever." Nothing can be stronger than our Saviour's words on this point. If our right eye offend us, that is, if it tempt us to sin,—as numbers are tempted to sin by the lusts of the eye,—we are to pluck it out and cast it from us. If our right hand prove a temptation to us, we are to cut it off. And along with this command, so hard to flesh and blood, our Lord has been graciously pleased to tell us the reason why we are to obey it: because it is better for us to enter into life halt or maimed, or with one eye, than to be cast into everlasting fire with two legs, and two hands, and two eyes.

This, my brethren, is the reason why we are to repent; because, irksome as repentance may be, it is only through the strait gate that we can enter into life. Does any man think of doubting whether recovering from sickness is a good thing? Did any man in his senses ever blame another, for choosing to get well at whatever cost and trouble, when he might have saved himself all this annoyance by letting himself be lifted out of bed into his coffin? for choosing to have a mortified leg cut off, when he might have kept it on,

and become a corpse? Nay further: did any man in his right mind ever say, "It is true, I am very ill. Every day that I put off taking medicine, I grow worse, and there is less and less chance of my recovery. Notwithstanding I will delay getting well for another twelvemonth; and then I will set about it in good earnest." If such language would be downright madness, with regard to the disorders of the body, how comes it to be less than madness when used of the disorders of the soul? How comes it that so many think these mad thoughts, and speak these mad words, about repentance? How comes it that so many go on year after year putting off the time of taking the only medicine, which can restore us through God's help to our natural health, and make us ourselves again?

For man, as he now is, is not himself. He is not what God made him. God made him to lead a holy and godly life; and such is the life to which Jesus Christ came to restore him. This therefore is our true nature, the nature in which man was made, the nature which Christ came to restore. Sin however has become a kind of second nature to us. In an ancient story-book we read of a great warrior, who was persuaded through the malice of his enemy to put on a poisoned robe; and the robe stuck to his body, so that it was im-

possible to pull it off, without tearing off some of the flesh. It stuck to him as if it had been glued on; and the poison ate into his flesh, and killed him. Thus is it with sin. It cannot be torn off, without drawing blood from our souls: but if we let it remain on, it kills us. Therefore must we tear it off, without shrinking or flinching from the pain it may cost us to do so. We must escape to the mountain; because we are fleeing from Sodom; and because we cannot tarry in Sodom without being consumed by its fire.

It is impossible to press this point too strongly: so I will try to enforce what I have said by another parable. On the seashore, many of you must know, there are often rocks. Now suppose a man, walking among these rocks, and finding the stones painful to his feet, thinks he shall walk more easily and pleasantly on the smooth sand below. He quits the rocks, and goes down to the sands. The tide is out; the sea is calm; the waves are a long way off: there can be no danger: so he walks on. Presently the wind begins to rise. Still there can be no danger: it is only rounding that jutting cliff: there is plenty of time; and then he will be safe. Meanwhile the sea comes on, gradually, gradually, wave after wave, like so many lines of horsemen in battle array riding one after the other. Every moment they advance a step or two; and before

the man has got to the jutting cliff, he sees them dashing against its feet. What is he to do? On one side of him is a steep and rugged ledge of rocks; on the other side the sea, which the wind is lashing into a storm, is rushing toward him with all its might and fury. Would a man in such a plight think of losing another moment? Would he stop to consider, whether he should not hurt his hands by laying hold of the sharp stones? Would not he strain every nerve to reach a place of safety, before the waves could overtake him? If his slothfulness whispered to him, "It is of no use; the ledge is very steep; you may fall back when you have got half way; stay where you are; perhaps the wind may drop, or the waves may stop short; and so you will be safe here;"—if his slothfulness prompted such thoughts as these, would he listen to them? Would he not reply, "Hard as the task may be, it must be tried, or I am a dead man. God will not work a miracle in my behalf: he will not change the course of the tides, and put a new and strange bridle on the sea, to save me from the effects of my own laziness. I have still a few minutes left: let me make the most of them, and I may be safe: if they slip away, I must be drowned." This picture is not a mere piece of fancy. Many stories are told of the risks people have run by the coming in of the tide, when they

were straying heedlessly along the sands. Some by great efforts, aided by God's good providence, have escaped. Others have perished miserably. Now the sinner is just in the situation of the man I have been speaking of. On one side of him is the steep ledge of repentance; on the other the fiery waves of the bottomless pit are every moment rolling on toward him. Could his eyes be opened, as the eyes of Elisha's servant were, he would see those fiery waves already beginning to surround him. Is this a situation for a man to stop in? Will any one in such a plight talk about the difficulty of repentance? Let passion cry out, "It is hard to deny oneself:" faith must make answer, "It is harder to dwell amid endless burnings."

There is one great difference however between the man walking on the seashore, and the sinner loitering on the edge of the fiery lake. The former will try to climb the rocks, because they offer him a chance of escaping; but if we try to climb the ledge of repentance, our escape is certain, provided we begin in time. Jesus Christ himself is standing at the top of that ledge, crying to us, "Why will ye perish?" He stretches out his hands to us, to help us up: we have only to lay hold on them, and we are safe.

But then we must begin in time. If a man sets

about climbing a steep cliff, when he is young and active, and has the free use of his limbs, he has a great advantage: the old and the crippled are pretty sure to fail. So is it with repentance. The young can mount the hill, if they set about it in good earnest, with much less toil. But they who are old in sin, they whose souls have become stiff through years of wickedness, and have grown double, so to say, by always looking earthward,—how can they make the efforts which are needed for such a task? Of all hopeless miracles the miracle of a deathbed repentance seems to me one of the most hopeless. Therefore repent in time; that is, repent now: for now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.

SERMON XIII.

CONVINCE A MAN OF SIN;

THE BEST PREPARATION FOR PASSION WEEK.

ROMANS vii. 23.

I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.

WE are already half through Lent; and it is time we should turn our minds to those thoughts and to those subjects which will best prepare us for Passion week, more especially for Good Friday, the most solemn day, the most shameful day, and the saddest day in the christian year. But what is Passion week? It is the week of the Passion: that is to say, the week of suffering. For passion in old English means suffering, more particularly the suffering of Jesus Christ. Thus you read in the book of Acts, that Jesus shewed himself alive after his passion, that is, after his suffering on the cross.

Thus too in the Litany we beseech our blessed Lord to deliver us by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, or by the cross and al that he suffered on it. Again in the Communion Service we are exhorted to give most humble and hearty thanks to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for the redemption of the world by the death and passion, or sufferings, of our Saviour Christ, both God and man. Passion week then is the season when we are more especially called upon to commemorate and call to mind and ponder and think over the sufferings of our Saviour Christ, during that dreadful week, when he was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, and by them was falsely accused, reviled, mooked, scourged, crowned with thorns, and at last crucified.

Now to the end that we may keep Passion week in a proper manner, by thinking and feeling about Christ's sufferings as we ought to do, the Church has appointed the forty days of Lent to be a sort of preparation for Passion week and Easter, just as it has appointed the four Sundays in Advent to be a preparation for Christmas. For there are two great seasons in the year which it behoves every Christian to keep, who wishes to pay dutiful honour to his Saviour, or who would awaken and stir up his heart to a thankful recollection of what Christ has done for mankind. The first

season is Christmas, in honour of Christ's birth, to preserve the memory of his wonderful loving-kindness in coming down from heaven, and putting on the nature of man. The other season is Passion week and Easter, to commemorate his love in dying for us, and to celebrate the glory of his Resurrection. Both these seasons are so important, and it is of such moment to the welfare of your souls that you should keep them both in a godly manner, that the Church has set apart the Sundays in Advent, which come before Christmas, and the forty days of Lent, which come before Passion week, as a time of preparation for them.

The use of such a preparation is plain enough. In the first place it answers the same purpose that the early bell on Sunday is meant to answer. As that bell calls us to get ready for church, so do Advent and Lent call on us to get ready for Christmas and for Easter. When a musical instrument has been laid by a while, it needs being put in tune; or it will make but sorry music. The minds and hearts of most Christians too require to be got into tune, before they can bear their part fitly and harmoniously in the services by which the Church commemorates the birth and death and resurrection of her Lord.

But there is another use in these times of pre-

paration. They are, or ought to be, times of teaching and instruction. They are times when a minister is especially called upon to teach his flock all that it concerns them so much to know, first about the great purpose for which Christ came into the world, and secondly about his wonderful lovingkindness in dying for mankind.

The purpose for which our Saviour came into the world was, that he might give us light. He was a light, a heavenly light, to lighten the Gentiles: he came to give light to those who were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death: and he is therefore called in Scripture the Sun of Righteousness. Now the best way of preparing you to rejoice heart and soul at the coming of that heavenly light,—the best way of leading you thankfully to hail the rising of the Sun of Righteousness,—is to give you a picture of the gross darkness which pressed like a heavy mildew on the hearts and consciences of men, before our Lord came down from heaven, and scattered the fog of sin and death, just as the sun scatters the night-fog at his rising. Thoroughly to enjoy the blessing of light, we must know what a woe darkness is, when it comes with all its terrors. Therefore one of the ways in which a minister is to prepare his people for Christmas, is, by telling them of the wretched ignorance and contented

wickedness in which the Gentiles, and I might almost say, the Jews too, were lying sunk at the time when our Saviour was born.

But how is he to prepare them for Passion week? By speaking to them of sin. For it was sin that caused Christ's death. He is the Lamb of God, who died for the sins of the whole world,—that by his precious blood-shedding he might reconcile and re-unite us to the Father, and might obtain the Holy Ghost for us, to regenerate us, and, as it were, spiritually re-create us, so that we might become new men, and be turned from the power of Satan to God. This was the main reason why Christ died, that he might procure us the pardon of our past sins, and grace to help us for the future. Now is it not plain, that, in order to understand the value of this mercy, we must begin with being convinced of the hatefulness and danger of sin? Suppose I were to tell a heathen of Christ's mercy in dying for sinners, to purchase for them God's forgiveness and the help of the Holy Ghost. If the heathen were righteous in his own eyes, he would answer, "What is that to me? I want no pardon. I am no sinner. I never robbed or murdered any one. As for the help of the Holy Ghost, I have no need of that either. I am good enough without." Such would be the answer of a heathen

who was righteous in his own eyes, were I to speak to him of the benefits of Christ's death. But begin with convincing him of sin; hold the glass of truth up to his soul, that he may see its loathsomeness and its weakness; make him feel that God is of purer eyes than to behold any iniquity,—not great iniquities, mind, the Bible does not say that,—not horrid and abominable crimes only, but all offenses, all iniquities,—that the very heavens are not pure in his sight, and that he charges even his angels with folly; make the heathen understand that God requireth truth in the inward parts, in other words, that it is not enough to keep from outward acts of sin, but that we must govern our very thoughts and wishes; and, when you have thus set the law of God before him in all its depth and breadth and purity, bid him look within; shew him the law in his members, the corrupt affections and propensities of his fallen nature, warring against and overpowering the law in his soul, the law of God written in his heart, and proclaimed by his reason and his conscience, so that the good, which he approves, he does not, and the evil, which he condemns, he does; and what will this heathen say then? Will he not start back in affright from this picture of his misery and weakness? will he not cry with an exceeding bitter cry, "Wretched man that I am! who will

deliver me from the body of this death? These are St Paul's own words, my brethren: and now mark the words which come after them. "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Hence we learn that our thankfulness for the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ springs out of, and is in proportion to, our sense of our own guilt and weakness. For if we are guilty, we need pardon; if we are weak, we need help: and both has Christ purchased for us. On the other hand, if we are not guilty, we want no pardon; if we are not weak, we want no help: why then should we feel grateful to Christ for bringing us gifts which we have no need of? In a word, the guilt of man and the weakness of man, which spring like two crooked and blighted stems, with all their poisonous fruitage, from one and the same evil root, the corruption of his nature,—that guilt and that weakness are the first elementary truths which meet us at the very threshold of Christianity: and unless you feel these truths, and are as much convinced of them, as you are that fire burns, you can no more make advances in religion, than a man can read a chapter in the Bible without knowing his alphabet.

Accordingly when St Paul, in the Epistle from which the text comes, is about to set forth the great doctrine of justification by faith, and salva-

tion through the merits and blood of Christ, he begins by a catalogue of the sins of the Gentiles and of the Jews, which he gives at such length that it fills the first two chapters. Not that he had any liking to think and talk about such foul and wicked practices: he says himself in another place, that it is a shame even to speak of such things: but he knew from his master's teaching, that it is not the healthy who need a physician, but the sick, and that therefore, until he had convinced his patients, both Jews and Gentiles, that they were sick at heart, he could not hope that they would be brought to seek a cure from the great physician of souls.

In like manner, Isaiah, the evangelical prophet, as he is called, for speaking so fully of Christ and his kingdom, ushers in his prophecy of the manifold blessings of that kingdom,—how? by telling us of God's great goodness? No: but by telling us of man's great wickedness. "Hear, O heavens! (he cries,) and give ear, O earth! for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib! but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah, sinful nation! a people laden with iniquity"—observe the words, laden with iniquity, as if it were a sore burthen,

too heavy to be borne—"a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters!"—boys and girls that, as soon as they can run about, or at any rate by the time they are ten or twelve years old, corrupt one another, and teach and learn of each other not all the good they can, but all the evil. "They have forsaken the Lord: they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint."

Assuredly it is not by chance that the most evangelical of the prophets, and the most doctrinal of the apostles, both begin in the same way, by speaking of the sinfulness of man, of the weakness and sickness of our souls. They did it, because they knew it was as necessary for them to begin thus, as for a builder, who would have his house stand, to lay a deep and strong foundation. The only support of christian holiness is christian faith and love: and the only true, the only possible foundation, humanly speaking, for christian faith and love, is a deep and strong conviction of all that Christ has borne and wrought for us,—a conviction of our need of his pardon, of our need of his help,—a conviction how utterly ruined and lost we are without that pardon and aid,—in a word, a conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of the utter helplessness of our nature. This is the only foundation of

christian doctrine, the only root of the christian graces.

We must be convinced that our helplessness is such as can only arise from an evil bias in our nature,—that we are sinners, and cannot become otherwise through any power of our own,—that sin is born in the bone, as the saying is, and will not out of the flesh;—that there is indeed a law in our members, warring against the law of our reason and conscience, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, which is in our members. Now this doctrine, which so humbles and casts down all the pride and vain boastings of man, seems to many people very hard; so that they will even say they do not believe it. They tell us it is impossible,—that we are God's favorite creatures,—that he has made us the lords of the creation, and heirs of eternal life,—and that therefore it is quite impossible that we should be so prone to sin, as the Bible, and our Church, setting forth the doctrine of the Bible in her Articles and Homilies, declare us to be. Now the plain answer to this fine reasoning is: it may seem to you impossible; but the fact is so notwithstanding. This is the answer, and a full answer, and in truth the only answer that can be made. If we were not men ourselves, and merely knew that such animals lived in some other place,—in the

moon for instance, or in that beautiful star which shines so brightly of an evening,—there would be nothing unreasonable in trying to guess and fancy what such creatures might be. But seeing that we are ourselves men, and can look into ourselves, and can see and feel in some sort what our hearts are made of, the question is not what we are likely to be, but what we really are. Where the fact lies at a man's door, there is no room for guess-work.

The question whether we are not prone to sin from our cradles upward, is a mere question of fact. It is a fact too which everybody can speak to for himself: he has only to look within. Look within then, my brethren, into your own hearts: I advise, I exhort, I entreat you,—in God's name I command you, in the name of our blessed Saviour and Master I entreat you, to look within. Look into your hearts, and tell me what you find there. Is it good? or is it evil? You will say, a little of both. Be it so: tell me then, or rather tell yourselves, honestly and truly, which of the two cost you the most trouble to learn? the good, or the evil? Which of the two came the easiest and the most naturally? Is there a doubt? Can any one doubt that it is easier to get bad habits than good ones? Can any one doubt that it is easier for a sober man to become a drunkard,

than for a poor miserable besotted drunkard to trace his steps back and to become sober.

One reason of this is plain: because God's service is perfect freedom; and so we may leave it when we please. Whereas the devil's service is a miserable bondage. No master is more cruel; no servitude is more wearing; no chains are heavier or stronger or harder to break. If you doubt this, ask the drunkard, whether he would not wish to become sober, whether he would not wish to leave off a habit which gives him sore eyes and shaking hands, a habit which turns him into a brute beast, which clothes him in rags and poverty, which is hurrying him to the grave in this world, and will send him to a worse grave in the next: ask the poor wretch this; and he will tell you, he would give anything to become as sober as he was in his childhood. Ask him then, why he does not leave off drinking; since he knows the habit is so bad, and wishes so much to leave it off? His answer will be, "Because I can't." What is this but saying, "Sin has got so strong a hold on me, I cannot escape from her clutches?"

This then is one reason why bad habits are so much harder to break through than good ones. Another reason, and the chief one, is, because our nature is corrupt, and apter to evil than to good,

to wrong than to right, to do the devil's work than to do God's work.

Let us look at the question from another point of view. Ask mothers, who have seen and watched children from their infancy, whether every child they ever saw had not something to learn that was good, and something to unlearn that was evil. Now where did this evil come from? It cannot have been taught to the child; for I am speaking of a time before all teaching. But if the evil was not taught to the child, the child must have had it naturally. So it is in other things. The good wheat must be sown and well looked after; or it will never come to much. The weeds sprout up and spread of themselves; and it is as great a labour to keep them down, as to get the good wheat up. The truth is, man is naturally prone to sin: his nature is corrupt: and without God's help he can no more mend it, than a sick man can mend and cure himself without the help of a physician.

But some may say, if this be so, if we are naturally so given to evil, it cannot be our fault if we do wrong. It is our misfortune: we cannot help it: and God will never blame or punish us for not being better than he made us. You might as well blame a sick person for dying, as blame a man for sinning, if his nature is so corrupt

and evil. No doubt, it would be very hard,—I have spoken a bold word; but St Paul speaks as bold a one,—it would be very hard and unjust to punish men for what they cannot help. It would be very unjust to blame a sick man for dying, provided there were no physicians. But in a country where there are plenty of physicians, and the sick have only to send for them,—if in such a country a sick man is obstinate, and will not send for a physician, and will not take the means of being made well, he is to blame; and if he dies, he is guilty of his own death. Suppose now that the physician does not wait to be sent for, that he comes of his own accord to the sick man's bedside, that he brings a medicine of rare herbs in his hand, and says to the sick man, "My friend, I heard you were very ill, and so I am come to see you. You certainly are very sick indeed, worse than you are aware of: for the fever gives you false spirits. Your disease is the leprosy; but it is a kind of leprosy, which, instead of breaking out openly, burns and dries up the inside. However, I have brought you a medicine, which will cure you, if you will take it. It is a medicine of rare herbs that come from the Indies; and I have paid a great price for it. I cannot bear to see a fellow-creature so near death, without helping him. Never mind your poverty; I want no payment. I

will give you the medicine freely, with all my heart, if you will only take it." But the sick man refuses to take it. He does not like its look; or he tastes it, and finds it bitter, and will not swallow it; or he believes a neighbour, who tells him not to trust the physician, and that a glass of good wine is worth all the physic in the world. He will not take the physic; he drinks the wine instead; and the next morning he dies. Who is to blame?

My brethren, this is our case. We have this leprosy. We cannot cure ourselves. But Jesus Christ is come to us, the great physician of the soul. We could not go to him; but he is come to us. He has warned us of our danger. He gives us his medicine without money and without price. And well is it for us that he does so: for the medicine is so precious, that, if this church were a lump of gold, it would be as worthless as a grain of dust, compared with one drop of that healing medicine. He alone was rich enough to pay the price of the medicine: and that price was his own life. He died, that we might live,—that we might be healed of our deadly sickness,—that we might be washed and made clean from the leprosy of sin,—that our flesh might come again like the flesh of little children,—and that so we might be healed, and might live indeed, the only life worth living, a life of holiness and godliness,

of honesty and soberness and purity. He has done all this for us. He has brought the medicine to our door: shall we refuse to take it? shall we say that we know better than he does, what will do us good? that we will have none of his medicine? We may say this if we please: for we are free to take the medicine or to leave it. But if we refuse to listen to him, and die in our sins, who will be to blame? No one except ourselves: and we shall be the losers and the sufferers.

This then is the right preparation for Passion week, to think seriously of our sins, which were the cause of Christ's sufferings, to sorrow over them, and to repent of them: and therefore Lent is appointed by the Church to be a season of humiliation and mortification and penance, that by passing through this strait gate we may be prepared to receive the pardon of the sins, of which we have repented, declared to us from the cross of Christ. My brethren, have you, each of you, such a sense of the sinfulness, the vileness of sin, as covers you with shame, fills you with godly sorrow, and leads you to seek pardon and comfort where alone it can be found, at the foot of the cross? Then shall ye be meet to hear the prayer which Jesus from that cross offers up for you to his Father, that he will forgive you. Have you such a thorough conviction of your own weakness,

are you so fully aware that there is a law in your members warring against the law of God, and tempting you to what you know to be wrong, as leads you to pray heartily to God, that he will send his Holy Spirit to dwell with you, and help you to all holiness of living? If you have, happy are you; for then you are in the road to heaven. But if you have not this sense of your sinfulness and your weakness, if you are without christian fear, and without christian thankfulness, if you neither think of Christ as a Saviour, nor pray for the Holy Ghost as a Comforter, then are you living in a christian country strangers to the very elements of Christianity: and it will be better in the day of judgement for Jews and heathens, who have never heard these truths, than for you who have heard them, but not heeded them.

SERMON XIV.

THE ATONEMENT.

1 Timothy i. 15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He left all the glories of heaven: he came from the bosom of the Father, and was made man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and, after a life of toil and heavy care, he died a painful and shameful death upon the cross. Do you ask why he did this? why he gave up so much glory and blessedness? why he underwent so much pain? why he suffered the Jews to put him to such a cruel death? St Paul tells you: he did it to save sinners. He did it to re-unite us to the Father, and as it were to fasten and cement us to holiness and godliness with his most precious blood. Being God as well as man, I need not

tell you, that he bore all those dreadful pains and insults and injuries, which you read of in the 26th and 27th chapters of St Matthew, and in the latter chapters of the other Gospels,—I need not tell you that Jesus bore all these things of his own free will. It was with his own consent that the Jews nailed his innocent feet and hands to the cross. It was with his own consent that they spat on him, that they scourged him, that they dragged him before Pilate, that they condemned him to die, that they made him bear his cross, that they wagged their heads at him and reviled him. If he had *not* permitted them to do all this, they could not have done it. The power of his word, which had calmed the fury of the sea, and tamed such as were possest by devils, would easily have quieted and put down the violence of those wicked men. A wish, a single wish would have been enough to free him: a single wish would have been enough to scatter all his enemies, in the midst of their blasphemies, of their mockery, of their malignant taunts. "Thinkest thou," he says, "that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" armies of heavenly soldiers, with their chariots of fire and horses of fire, any one of them powerful enough to destroy a world. But Jesus uttered no such prayer: and he tells us the

reason why: "Because thus it must be, that the Scriptures must be fulfilled." Which is as much as to say, God's word must be kept: his will must be done: his prophets have promised redemption and pardon to the children of Adam through the blood of the Lamb of God. I am that Lamb. I am going therefore as a lamb to the slaughter: I must be gentle as a lamb; I must be unresisting as a lamb; that the great sacrifice, which is to be offered for the sins of the world, may be perfected, and that man may be freely pardoned, and united again to God.

This is the great secret, and the foundation stone of Christianity; that man is reconciled to God by the blood of Christ. This is the great mystery,—let me rather call it the great marvel and miracle, of the atonement, which no love less than God's could have desired, which no wisdom less than God's could have devised, which no power less than God's could have accomplished. It is of this, God's wonderful and wonder-working scheme for the redemption and salvation of his fallen creatures, that St Paul is speaking in the text; and how does he speak of it? He tells us, that "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation:" which means, that it is true, and a truth which concerns us very nearly. Many things are true, which do not concern us, and

which we are neither the better for knowing, nor the worse for not knowing. It is true for instance, that a king of England was put to death by his subjects something more than a hundred and eighty years ago. It is true, that in some countries the people live chiefly on fruits and rice. It is true again, that there are two distant points on the earth, where the sun only rises once and sets once in a year; so that each day and each night lasts six months. But, though these facts are true, the knowledge of them does you no good. It does not make you happier: it does not in any way make you better. Therefore no one would think of calling these truths worthy of all acceptation. The truth, on the other hand, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, is of quite another kind. It is a truth we are to turn to practical use, a truth we are to live by, a truth we are to be saved by. Therefore St Paul calls it worthy of all acceptation; not of a little acceptance, but of all. We are not to receive it with a slight welcome, and then think no more about it, as we might receive a neighbour, when he happens to call in for a few minutes. We are to receive it heartily and joyfully and entirely, with all acceptation, as a man would welcome his bride to his house, who is to be the inmate of it for life. This is the way that the great doctrine

of redemption and salvation by the blood of Christ ought to be received by every one. It deserves, it is worthy of entire and universal acceptation. Let me entreat you to lend me your ears, while I try to give you some account of it, and to shew you how excellent, how comfortable, how hopeful a doctrine it is.

In the first place it is clear that, if Jesus Christ came to save sinners, there must be sinners to be saved. Unless we know and feel that the heart of man naturally loves sin, and that nevertheless, when we love sin, we love a thing which we ought to hate, and which is a disease and disgrace to us, the sufferings and death of Christ will be as great a stumbling-block to us, as they were to the Jews, provided we ever think about them. If our thoughts do not turn that way, of course we shall not stumble at that stumbling-block: just as a man who keeps away from the narrow gate spoken of in our Saviour's parable, will never see and feel that it is narrow. This is the reason why there are so many people in the world, who call themselves Christians, yet live the life of heathens. They never think about the matter; and Christian seems to them as good a name as any other: so they are content to be called by the name of Christ, and to wear his livery, as long as they have no service to do him. But

God will not allow himself to be thus mocked. Remember the end of the man who hid his talent in a napkin. "Wicked and slothful servant" is the name his master calls him. God has given us the power of thinking: and for not using that power, or using it amiss, and employing it only on worldly things, he will surely call us to a strict account. Is the mind of man God's best and noblest gift? and is it the only thing on earth that is to lie fallow year after year? There are more parables, I believe, in the New Testament against taking no thought about heavenly things, and taking too much thought about earthly things, than against any other fault whatsoever.

But, if you do think, the whole mystery and miracles of the death and sufferings of our Saviour Christ will be a stumbling-block at the very outset, unless you know and feel the meaning of these four words, sin, and guilt, and justice, and punishment. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners," says Christ himself. It was useless to call those who fancied themselves righteous: they were satisfied already, and so would not come to him. "They that are whole," he says in another place, "have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." Does he mean that anybody is really whole? Not so: for we know that, in the language of Isaiah, "the whole head is sick,

and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" (i. 5, 6). Our Saviour's meaning is this: just as a man who thinks his body in good health, will not go to a physician, so the man who thinks his soul in good health, will not come to me It is the sick man, the man who knows himself to be at death's door, that sends the most anxiously for a physician. It is the man who feels that he has the deadly disease of sin upon him, that runs the most readily to Jesus, the great physician of the soul.

Now this deadly disease we all have: and by nature it is utterly incurable. Do any of you doubt what I say? Do any of you doubt your being sinners? Look into your hearts. Do you find the love of God there? Do you find the love of your neighbour there? Alas! it is a great thing, if, instead of love, you do not find hatred. Do not be startled, and think it impossible there should be anything so wicked as hatred in that good kind heart of yours. Look a little closer: probe a little deeper. What! no little grudge there against one neighbour for the affront he offered you a short time ago? No pleasure in speaking ill of somebody, who may have passed for a sort of pattern person in the next parish,

if he, or she, or their son or daughter, happen to have made a slip? No jealousy of another for being a little better off, or a little smarter, or a little more favoured in some way, than you are? "But he does not deserve it." For this is the common answer to such a charge. And what does that answer prove? It proves that you are looking at your neighbour's more prosperous condition with a sharp and unfriendly eye. If the same good fortune had befallen you, or your child, would you have been so very scrupulous about rejoicing at it, because you perhaps do not deserve it either? Why then this difference in the two cases? Because you are not jealous of yourself: and you are jealous of your neighbour. In other words, because you have an illwill to your neighbour, in comparison with the goodwill which you bear to yourself. Now what must that heart be, where all these little dirty selfish groveling spiteful feelings find a place? Is it in a sound state? in such a state as a heart ought to be? Yet I have not spoken of the greater sins, the grosser breaches of God's law. I have not said a word about that violence, that covetousness, that lust, that drunkenness, that revenge, which turn a common newspaper into a list and string of crimes.

Such is the state of man without religion; bad

and vile at the best; and for the most part desperately wicked. What then was God to do? Laws he had tried: and the holier the laws, the more pleasure men seemed to take in breaking them. Besides laws only tell us what is right: they arm us with no power of doing it. They are like so many looking-glasses, which shew us our ugliness and deformity, but cannot give us new faces and shapes. Moreover laws threaten punishment: and man had need to hear of pardon. Their language is: "Cursed is he that doeth not all the words of this law." "He that is guilty in one point, is guilty of all." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This is the terrible language of the law. Apply it, I beseech you, to your own case. Have you sinned? You are condemned to die. Have you broken any one of God's laws, in any one tittle, at any moment of your life? You know you have broken them in a thousand ways: many of you live in utter disregard of them. Alas! you are then accursed: and the Bible tells us what the fate of the accursed is to be. "Depart, ye accursed, into everlasting fire." Must this indeed be so? "Must I indeed go, merciful God! to dwell for ever with evil spirits in wailing and unutterable woe?" Such is the natural cry that would burst from every heart at hearing so fearful a sentence. Yet, if we look

into the matter, I see not where, out of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the sinner can turn for reasonable grounds of comfort. For we all know that God is just and true: and he has said he "will by no means clear the guilty." Now we are guilty: how then is he to clear us? Is the Almighty ruler of heaven and earth not to rebuke and punish wickedness? Is he to allow the whole assembled universe of angels and men, and every order of created spirits, to witness a sight so monstrous, so offensive to all reason, as an open rebellion against his authority, continual breaches of his law, a forgetfulness of his will for years and years, and yet to withhold his hand, and not to punish? "Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord?" But why say for years and years? Were the sun one morning to refuse to rise, were he to quit his place in the sky at midday, or to change his course and turn eastward, what dismay, what confusion, what destruction would it cause, even were he to do so once only! And has not your soul, which is better than a thousand suns, which shall outlive that glorious sun for thousands of years, which was made originally in the image of God himself,—has not your soul abandoned its place on earth, forgotten its duty, and gone back from the way of God's commandments. I verily believe, or I should not dare to say so in this holy

place,—I should not dare to lie to my own heart before God, even for the sake of winning you to Christ,—I verily believe, that were one of those pure and mighty spirits, who keep watch round the throne of God, to stand at this moment before our eyes, he would tell us that a deliberate and wilful sin is a sadder and more dreadful thing, an evil more difficult to amend and repair, than if the sun were to go out in mid heaven, and darkness to usurp the place of light. He would tell you, that he and his brethren could soon repair or replace the sun; but that for the wickedness, the stubbornness, the presumptuous rebellion of sin, he knew no remedy: he only knew that, unless God found a remedy, it must end in death and hell; and that he had sorrowed over it with a great but unavailing sorrow.

Is it then come to this? Must millions of millions of human beings, who have dwelt on this earth since the time of Adam, be all cast into endless torments? Is there to be sorrow in heaven over God's fallen creatures, and a jubilee among the devils for having ruined God's best work? Not so, my brethren. God himself has found the remedy: none but God could. He has sent his Son, to take our nature upon him, and to die on the cross, a ransom and a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Join with me in adoring the

wisdom and the love of this great plan: its wisdom; for it has enabled God to pardon us, and yet to shew how deeply he hates sin. Can any one pretend that God is indifferent about sin? can any one dare to fancy that sin is a light and trivial thing? when God, before he pardoned it, sent his only Son into the world to die for it. If he had pardoned sin without a sacrifice, we should have been led to doubt whether sin was really displeasing to God. But God has required a sacrifice: and that sacrifice is the life and death of Christ. He has given his well-beloved Son to suffer in the stead of a rebellious world: and, through this shewing forth of the most awful justice, he publishes the fullest and freest pardon. There is a story told of an ancient lawgiver, that, among the laws by which he endeavoured to uphold purity of life among his people, one was, that whoever committed adultery should lose both his eyes: having sinned through the lust of the eye, the eyes which ensnared him into sin were forfeit. Now it fell out that his own son was found guilty of adultery soon after. The father condemned him to lose both his eyes. So beloved however was he by the people, that all the city besought him to spare his son. At length he yielded. But how? He commanded the executioner to pluck out one of his own eyes, and then one of his son's. Thus

the law was satisfied; yet the guilty son was spared the loss of his sight: and the lawgiver, in the very act of setting aside the law, established it more firmly than ever. The story of a human lawgiver may help you to understand the manner in which God teaches us,—and teaches too at the very moment when he is pardoning us,—that he cannot loosen or break the chain, which fastens sin and woe together. That chain remains unbroken: yet the criminal is pardoned; the outcast is invited back; the prodigal son is welcomed home to his Father's house, and received again into full favour.

But the cross of Christ not only shews the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and proves the justice and the holiness of God, who would not pardon it without the sacrifice of the blood of his dear Son: it also proves the unspeakable love of our merciful Father for his sinful and rebellious children. "Herein is love," says St John; "not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John iv. 10). This is the proof of God's love: a stronger cannot be imagined. Would he have sent his only Son to die for us, if he had not loved us? If any of you are fathers, if any here are mothers, ask yourselves, would you give the life of one of your children for anything that you did not love?

But God gave the life of his only Son for the salvation and redemption of mankind. What a wonderful, what an awful, what a comfortable proof does this give of God's love! Surely it is a love that passeth knowledge. "God so loved the world," says our Lord himself, "that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16).

This then, my brethren, is the blessed truth, which St Paul calls worthy of all acceptation. While man was making a mock at sin, God came down from his throne of glory, and suffered death as a creature, the representative of sinners; and having done this, he declares to the world that sin can be forgiven. Here "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm lxxxv. 10). We are justified freely; but we are justified through the blood of Jesus Christ. If a man can hear this, without loving God, and striving to obey him, without loving Christ, and following him, without hating sin, which caused Christ's death, without loving his neighbour, for whom Christ died,—no more can be done for such a man. God has no second Son to send, no second ransom to offer. So teaches the apostle to the Hebrews: "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain

fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation" (x. 26, 27). To such a man, to the stubborn reckless sinner, the death of Christ is a fearful thing: for he is in fact as guilty of Christ's death, as if he had himself driven the nails into his hands and feet. He is crucifying the Son of God afresh: he is putting him by his evil deeds to open shame. To such a man, I say, the death of Christ ought to be a fearful thing. But to the penitent, humble, pious, and thankful Christian, it is the happiest, the most comfortable, the most blessed event that ever took place. It wipes out his transgressions: it confirms his pardon: it secures his acceptance with God. "What shall we say to these things?" The words are St Paul's: and I know not how I can conclude better than by repeating them. "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principali-

ties, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 31—39). But remember, my brethren, that, as St John tells us, "he who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure."

SERMON XV.

THE GOSPEL NEWS;

OR,

CHRIST'S VICTORY.

ISAIAH lii. 7.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!

THE message which our Saviour brought down to us from heaven, is called in the New Testament the Gospel, or the good news, of Jesus Christ: and the words spoken by the angel to the shepherds were much to the same purpose: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." Now what are these good tidings? what is this good news, which our Lord took so long and so toilsome a journey to bring us? this good news, the light of which brightened his feet as he trod over the tops of the mountains, when he came to declare

it to those who were sitting in the valley of the shadow of death? Those among you who are old enough to remember the late war, will be best able to answer this question. For they will know what good news in time of war means. In those days, if one heard the words *good news*, one immediately asked: "What! have we gained a great victory by sea? or a great victory by land? Have our sailors taken the French fleet? or our soldiers beaten the French army? And is the victory so complete a one as to give any hopes of peace?" These are the questions which everybody was wont to ask twenty years ago, when mention was made of good news. Now if in answer to these questions we had been told, "The good news just received is not solely about a victory by land, nor solely about a victory by sea, nor solely about peace, but about all three together: for we have beaten all our enemies in every possible way: we have beaten them both by sea and by land, and so thoroughly, that we are sure of making a safe and glorious peace to-morrow, provided we do not throw away the opportunity,"—if, I say, we had heard an answer of this sort to our questions about the good news, how happy, how proud, how well satisfied should we have been! We should have said, "This surely is the very best news that was ever brought to England."

Now the good news which our Lord brought us from heaven, is just news of this kind. He came on purpose to help us in our warfare; because he saw we were getting the worst. I need not remind you in what warfare the children of Adam were engaged at his coming: for the same warfare is going on now. Nor is there any necessity that I should tell you who our enemies were: for they were the same against whom we are still enlisted, against whom we have still to wage battle. Sin and Death were in those days, as they are still, the great enemies of mankind; and there seemed to be no possible end of the war, short of our utter discomfiture and destruction. Sin and Death were fighting side by side against us: the devil, like a mighty warrior, who had never found his match, was raging fiercely: and all whom he caught and seized, the grave, opening its wide mouth, swallowed up: so that there seemed to be no hope left for man. It was in this sad state of the war, when things were thus going against us, that Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, came down to our help and rescue. Have you ever thought of David delivering the lamb out of the lion's mouth, and smiting the lion and the bear, that had come to attack his father's flock? You will then have a lively image of our helplessness in the clutches of Sin and Death, until Jesus

vouchsafed to come and deliver us from those iron clutches. For we are God's flock; and out of that flock, Satan, that roaring lion, was not merely taking a single lamb: he was carrying off the whole flock one by one, to tear and mangle and devour, when the glorious Son of David, seeing and pitying our wretchedness, came to our aid, and fought and conquered for us, and delivered us from the jaws of our destroyer, and therewith from the power and fear of death. This is the good news, —news of a victory over Sin, news of a victory over Death,—news lastly of a reconciliation with our God and Father, against whom we had been lured by our enemy Sin to be guilty of treachery and rebellion. And is not this the best of all news? Is it not a good thing to know that we can now resist Sin through the grace of Christ, who makes us more than conquerors? Is it not a good thing to know that we have no more to fear Death, now that Christ has brought life and immortality to light, and set it clearly before our eyes? Above all, is it not a blessed thing to be assured that God will receive us into favour, notwithstanding our manifold offenses, if we will turn to him, and trust in his promises, and believe that he can and will forgive us, and act as becomes the penitent who have been pardoned?

Is not this, I say, the very best of news? Now

this is the very news that Jesus brought us. He has not put an end to the war as yet; but he has set it quite on a new footing. Sin is still abiding in the world, notwithstanding the victories of Jesus, just as a remnant of the Canaanites was left on the borders of the promised land, notwithstanding the victories of Joshua. Those Canaanites, the Bible tells us, were left to try the children of Israel, and to teach them war (Judges iii. 1, 2): and it is perhaps for a like reason that Sin is still left on earth, in order that we may be put to the test, to prove whether we choose to obey God or no, and that we may be trained to our duties as Christ's soldiers by a course of hard service against God's enemies. These seem to be among the reasons why Sin is still permitted to carry on war against us, and why Death, which is inseparable from Sin, still goes on prowling about the world. But though the war is still raging between the children of Adam on the one side, and Sin and Death on the other side, how different are the prospects of that war since Jesus came to our aid! Before his birth the struggle seemed hopeless. Here and there perhaps one or two might be enabled to make a fight; like good old Simeon, and Anna the prophetess, and righteous Zachariah, and Nathanael, and the good centurion: and doubtless there were a few more, whose names are known to God only.

But for the great bulk of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, the battle against Sin was in those days quite hopeless. Sin was every day waxing stronger, and spreading wider; goodness on the other hand was growing weaker and rarer. Man felt himself to be overmatched by Sin: he was utterly unable to make head; indeed he could scarcely lift up his hand against it.

Such was the state of the war at Christ's coming. Satan was carrying all before him; and man had no chance of victory. But all this is now changed, and most blessedly for the better. We are no longer the weaker side. While the power of Sin and Satan has been much lessened by Christ's coming, our weakness has been much strengthened by helps of various kinds: so that he who fights under Christ's standard, may fight with good courage, knowing what those helps are;—knowing that his heavenly Captain has provided armour of proof for him, a helmet of salvation, a breastplate of righteousness, a shield of faith, armour strong enough, if we only put it on, to save us from all the darts and bullets of the enemy. Nor is the giving us this armour all that Christ has done, to aid us in our hard warfare. He has sent his Spirit to strengthen us while we are standing. He has given us his cross to catch hold of when we are falling. He has proclaimed that we are at

peace with God, that we may fight with a better heart. He has promised and assured us of a glorious triumph for every one who will fight his best. Moreover he has declared that, though Death is allowed for the present to mow down the bodies of his faithful soldiers, its power over them shall cease after a time, and that then he will raise them up to life again. Rejoice, therefore, ye that mourn; be comforted, ye that are in affliction; let your tears be turned into smiles, your sobs into thanksgivings: for the Lord has brought you good tidings of consolation concerning all who have died in his faith and fear.

Such is the news which Jesus has brought us. Such is the blessed change in the prospects of our warfare, which our Lord has wrought for his faithful soldiers. Whereas men before could not cope with sin, we may now be sure of overcoming it. Whereas men before shuddered at the thought of death, as the dark and dismal end of all things, we have now been taught to look upon it as the gate of a more glorious life. Whereas men before felt that they were at enmity with God, and therefore could not love him or take pleasure in him, they now know that he is ready to receive them into favour, and will treat them as sons, if they will only behave to him as such.

But some of the more unlearned among you

may perhaps ask, "How can we be sure that these things are so?" Because they are all written in the New Testament; in which the good news of Jesus Christ is published and declared to the sons of men, and is handed down from generation to generation, without the possibility that anything should be added to it, or anything taken away from it, or anything altered in it. There it stands unchanged and unchangeable in every essential point, the very same good news which St Peter and St John and St Paul preached to the people of their time, and then wrote down for our instruction. That the New Testament does indeed set forth all I have been telling you about the good news of Jesus Christ, and the great advantages of his coming, three texts from St Paul will suffice to prove. The first of them describes the wretched plight in which even the better part of mankind were before the coming of Christ, because they felt themselves unable to contend with sin: the second speaks of the victory which Christ has given us: the third of the happy peace which he has made between sinners and the God of heaven.

The first text is this: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24.) That is to say, who shall deliver man from the yoke of sin, which

hangs like a dead weight about him, clogging and hindering him in his efforts after holiness? Can any words be stronger? Could a man more feelingly express the loathsomeness of the sin which held him in its bondage, than by calling it a body of death, and likening it to a dead body which he could not help carrying about with him? And who has delivered man from this dead body? The answer is given in the next verse: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." God has delivered us from this crushing load of sin; and he has done it through Jesus Christ.

But this glorious truth of our deliverance is still more strongly, or at least more clearly, stated in the second text: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. xv. 56). Here death is represented as a serpent with a sting, which draws all its venom, all its terrors, and all its danger from sin: whereby we are to understand that, were there no such thing as sin in this world, we should have no reason to fear death. Why should men, why do they,—men I mean who have never heard of the Gospel,—shrink from lying in their coffins, more than from lying in their beds? Simply because they know not what may happen to them after death: and the consciousness of having offended God, the fear of what may befall them from his wrath, must

needs haunt and trouble a man, and keep him from dying calmly. These are the worst, the most painful, the most incurable terrors, which the thought of death can awaken; and they draw all their poison from sin. It is sin too that gives death all its danger: for sin alone can kill the soul. After having thus represented death as a serpent, the apostle goes on to speak of sin as an enemy; which is the same figure as I have been making use of above: "the strength of sin is the law." Here Sin is described as a strong enemy coming against us. And how is he armed? in what does his great strength lie? In the law: not in the law of Moses merely, but in the law written in the hearts of all who have the gift of reason and conscience. This law Sin, before the coming of Christ, brandished in every man's face, crying with a sneer of scorn, "Do this or die. Look, wretched man, look here at this law which I am holding up to your eyes! Behold here what God requires of you. These are his laws, his commandments! Have you kept them? Have you done them? all? always? You have not, I know you have not. I read your guilt in your face. Your conscience is bearing witness against you, that you have not kept these righteous laws. Here is my indictment against you: here is a warrant from God, whose laws you have broken: here is a sentence pro-

nounced on you by the just judge. He condemns you for your disobedience: he banishes you from his presence: he gives you over to me, to be my slave and victim: for I am Sin." Such is the boasting language which we may suppose Sin or Satan to have uttered in the heart of a thinking man before the coming of Christ. When thus armed with the law of God, sin is too much for us. So that man is represented by St Paul as in a twofold danger; from the venomous serpent, Death, and from the strong enemy, Sin. Now mark what comes next; for it justifies all I have told you about the good news of Jesus Christ: "But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" Here St Paul plainly tells us that, notwithstanding the strength of sin, notwithstanding the poison of death, God has given us the victory over sin and death, through Jesus Christ.

The third text I promised to lay before you, was to shew that Christ has made peace between sinners and the King of heaven. A very few words from the Epistle to the Romans (v. 1) will prove that "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Thus have I set before you three texts,—the first describing the wretchedness of our state before the coming of Christ,—the second shewing

how poisonous death, and how strong and irresistible sin would be, unless Christ had given us the victory over them, and assuring us that Christ has indeed given us that victory,—the third declaring in plain terms that we are now at peace with God. This then is the blessing of the Gospel: this is the good news which Christ has brought us. If peace with the King of kings,—if the being reconciled to our heavenly Father,—if a glorious victory over Sin and Death,—if our deliverance from a heavy and loathsome yoke, which none but Christ could have taken off our necks,—if all this deserves the name of good news,—then is the Gospel the very best news ever uttered in the ears of mortal man. Shall we not rejoice at this good, this glorious, this blessed news? No, my brethren; not just now. This is no day for rejoicing. Some of you must be old enough to remember the battle of Trafalgar. It was the greatest naval victory the English ever won. It wholly crushed the power of the enemy by sea. It destroyed the great fleet which he had fitted out and manned to invade and conquer England. Yet, when the news of this great victory came, there were few eyes that did not shed a tear, few hearts that did not heave a sigh. The joy of the nation was dashed with sorrow. For the admiral, to whose courage and skill we owed that victory, fell himself at the moment of

gaining it. He bought it for us with his life: and even in the midst of our triumph we could not but grieve for the loss of so brave a commander. My brethren, the joy of a Christian, at the very best, must be dashed with awe and sorrow. Even when we rejoice in the Lord, we must rejoice with trembling. But this is no day for rejoicing at all. It is a day for sorrow, a day for humiliation and shame. You have heard in the second lesson and the Gospel for the day, how great, how inestimable a price was paid for the victory which Christ won for us. You have heard how the Captain of our salvation not only fought and conquered, but died for us. Nay, it was by dying that he conquered for us. His death was not a chance of war, like that of other captains: he laid his life down by his own will and deed: of his own accord he underwent all those horrid pains and insults: he came from heaven on purpose to undergo them: because it had pleased his Father to decree that without blood-shedding there should be no remission of sins, that, except through the blood of the holy Jesus, there should be no salvation for mankind. It is this that makes the story so touching, so full of woe. We see the Lamb of God, with all the helplessness of a lamb, coming meekly and resignedly to the sufferings, which his human nature shrank from. We see him leaning

over the deep gulf, which was yawning darkly before his feet,—looking down into it with a trembling eye, which pierced to its lowest depths, and counted up all its miseries and horrors,—and then saying, "This pit is very terrible: but, if it be thy will, O my Father, that I should suffer this, I am content. If there be no way to save mankind from falling into this gulf, except by falling into it myself, let them lead me and cast me in." Surely when we are commemorating this painful, this merciful sacrifice and self-devotion of the Son of God for our sakes, the good news of the Gospel, full of comfort as it is, should awaken us to sorrow and shame.

Yes, my brethren, we should be smitten with shame, as well as with sorrow, by the thought of Christ's sufferings. Indeed the sorrow would be unprofitable, without the shame. For why did Christ undergo all this extreme anguish and agony? what was the cause of his sufferings? Your sins, and mine. He died for our sins. How then, with this dismal truth staring us in the face, how can we carry our heads aloft, as if we had no reason for self-abasement? What would you have done, if you had been Jews, and if, after having stood among the mob around Pilate's judgement-seat,—after crying out, "Not this man, but Barabbas!"—you had been converted by the preaching

of the apostles? Such Jews there must no doubt have been: some assuredly must have been converted by the apostles after our Lord's ascension, who but a while before had joined in crying, "Crucify him! crucify him! Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now I ask, had you been among those Jews, how would you have felt when Good Friday came round again? Would it have been a pleasant thought to you, that on that day year, or two years, you had been boisterously lifting up your voice against your Saviour, the innocent and holy Jesus? Would you have felt quite satisfied with yourselves, when the return of that day brought the remembrance of Christ's sufferings home to you? Would you not rather have humbled yourselves to the earth at the recollection of your crime? If you would, humble yourselves now. If you have ever been guilty of any wilful sin, humble yourselves now. For whoever commits any action which Jesus has forbidden, whoever cherishes any feeling or temper which Jesus disapproves, whoever prefers a gainful injustice, an angry passion, an evil lust, to the service of his Lord and Master,—every such person by his deeds, if not by his words, declares as plainly as the Jews did, "I will not have this man to reign over me: not this man, but Barabbas! I will have none of the purity and self-denial of Jesus: I like

drunkenness and rioting and debauchery far better. I will have none of his humility: give me pride. I will have none of his gentleness: give me anger. I will have none of his tender-heartedness: give me an easy careless indifference to the sufferings and griefs of others." How many in every place think thus, though they may not say it! Yet there can be no doubt that every sinful action is an open rejecting of our Lord and Master, and a preferring of some vile Barabbas to him.

Methinks however, some one among you is whispering to himself,—"This may be all very true of my neighbours; but happily it is not true of me. God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are. I have never swerved from the path of duty. I have kept all the commandments from my youth upward. Therefore I have no need to humble myself." Yes,—I would say to the man, who has this flattering, this mistaken, this false opinion of himself,—yes, even you have great need of humbling yourself, for not loving God and his Son more. Your words prove that you do not love God: if you did love him, you could never look on yourself as righteous before him. The self-righteous and self-satisfied have no idea of spiritual love: yet, if they are without that, they are nothing. To love our God, our Lord tells us, is the first and great commandment: how then

can any one pretend that he has kept all the commandments, when the love of God has no place in his heart? Nor is it enough to love the Father, unless we love the Son also, for having done and suffered such great and terrible things on our behalf. The man who can read the story of the Crucifixion, and know that it was for his sake, for his redemption, that Christ gave up the happiness of heaven, and vouchsafed to become man, and to undergo a lingering and shameful death,—the man, I say, who can know all this, without returning love for love, and feeling most deeply thankful for such wonderful, such unmerited goodness,—such a man may be decent in his behaviour; he may lead a respectable life; he may be esteemed a man of honesty and honour: but assuredly he has not the heart of a man, much less the spirit of a Christian. Humble yourselves therefore, ye self-righteous, and grieve over your want of love: humble yourselves, and cast yourselves on the ground before your crucified Lord.

SERMON XVI.

RISE WITH CHRIST.

COLOSSIANS iii. 1.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.

"CHRIST is risen!" Such is the greeting in Russia on the morning of Easter Day. In the great city of Moscow, and throughout the whole country, when two friends meet on this morning, one of them says to the other, "Christ is risen!" Among all the customs I ever read of, this to my mind is one of the most christian and most beautiful. It is seeing the resurrection of Jesus Christ in its true light, not as a fact which we are merely to believe, because it is written in the New Testament, without thinking or caring much about it, but as a piece of good news to ourselves, which we cannot help speaking of for joy. What the Russians then have said to each other on Easter

Day for hundreds of years, let me now say to you: let me say to you with a joyful and thankful heart, "Christ is risen."

The battle is over. The great contest between God, the incarnate Son, fighting for us, and Sin and Death fighting against us, is decided. Sin, having first been baffled by the life of blameless holiness, and unwearied active goodness, which the man Jesus so long led, was conquered Good Friday on the cross. Death, the last and only remaining enemy, was conquered this morning by the Resurrection. The victory is complete. Their yoke is broken: their sting is taken away: we have nothing more to fear from either. For Christ has risen, and by his rising has assured us that we shall rise also.

This is one of the reasons why the resurrection of Christ is so joyous, so heart-stirring an event: because it assures us that, if we follow the steps of his holy life, we too shall rise from the grave as he did. But there is also another resurrection of Christ's followers, of which the apostles are wont to speak, and of which they are wont to consider their Lord's resurrection as a type. And this resurrection is to take place even while we continue in this life, before we are laid in the grave. All who believe in Christ, says St Paul again and again, have risen with him,—not,

will rise with him, but *have risen* with him already. *If ye be risen with Christ*, are the words of the text,—not, if you are to rise with him hereafter, but if you are actually risen with him at this time,—seek the things which are above. Now what resurrection can this be? In what sense can a Christian, so long as he is carrying about this frail and perishable body, be said to be risen? In the chapter before the text, the apostle tells the Colossians, that they are "buried with Christ in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins, hath he quickened together with him." Thus again, when writing to the Romans, he tells them, that "so many as are baptized into Jesus Christ are buried with him by baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." For this reason baptism is called the washing of regeneration, that is to say, of a new or second birth. This too is what the Catechism teaches us, namely, that the inward and spiritual grace of baptism, or the spiritual benefit to which we are admitted by it, is a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.

Hence we learn that all who have been baptized,

all who have been received into Christ's family, ought to look upon themselves as having died with Christ, which death in them should be a death unto sin. Moreover, they should consider themselves as having risen with Christ by a new birth unto righteousness. And having so risen, they should shew that they have indeed risen with Christ, by leading a new life, and seeking the things which are above. As Christ did not break loose from the grave to tarry on earth, but, having risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, so, instead of lingering among the things of earth, we too, as the Collect for Ascension-day expresses it, should ascend into heaven in heart and mind, and dwell there with him continually.

In the first place every member of Christ's Church should look upon himself as having died with Christ, which death in him must be a death unto sin. "They that are Christ's (says St Paul) have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts" (Gal. v. 24): that is to say, they have done their utmost to root out and destroy the evil passions and inclinations natural to sinful man. St Peter in the same spirit, and nearly in the same words, writes thus: "Christ bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness" (1 ii. 24). But why is the forsaking sin,—which of course is the

thing signified,—called a death unto sin? It seems to be so called for two reasons: to express the completeness of the reformation and amendment which the Gospel requires from the sinner; and to express its difficulty and its painfulness.

For, if we are to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts, it is clear that sin is not a thing to be played or trifled with, or to be treated tenderly. We are not to make any covenant or truce with it, nor to shew it any mercy. Death, death is the word. We are to treat sin, as Saul was commanded to treat those sinners, the Amalekites: we are to give it no quarter: we are to fight against it, until it is utterly destroyed. Death, which is the portion of the rebel,—death, which is the portion of the murderer,—death, which is the certain doom of vipers, and hornets, and other evil and venomous creatures, whenever we can get at them to kill them,—death, and nothing less, is the sentence which God has passed upon sin. And what can be juster or more fitting, even by our own rules? For is not sin the great, the universal murderer, that first brought death into the world? Is not it poisonous and deadly to the bodies and souls of men? No wonder then that sentence of death has been pronounced against it! a sentence from which there is no reprieve. We must execute it on and in ourselves, if we would not have it executed upon

us. As Saul lost the kingdom of Israel by sparing Agag and the best of the sheep and oxen, so shall we lose the kingdom of heaven, if we spare a single one of those sins, which we are commanded utterly to destroy.

If the Gospel then had said no more than this, kill and destroy sin, pluck it up by the roots and cast it from you,—it would have laid down a rule wholly irreconcilable with all that parleying and truce-making, with all that harbouring and pampering of sin, which unhappily is so common. But Scripture not only bids us destroy sin: it says, Die unto sin. Mark the strength of the expression: *Die* unto sin. The dead know not, nor care for anything in this world. Their love and hatred and envy are clean wiped out. A dead man is as cold and motionless as a stone, to all that the living make the greatest stir about. How perfectly then, how, entirely, ought we to be free from sin, in order to be *dead* to it! It is not enough to keep from outward acts of sin, if the heart cherishes any secret liking for it. This is not dying to it. Before we can attain to that perfect sinlessness, our hearts must be as completely closed against the tempter, as if we were nailed down in our coffins; our ears must be deaf to his voice; our eyes must be blind to his charms. We must not only give up every evil

practice; we must also stifle every evil desire. Nothing less can deserve the name of being dead to sin. This then is the perfection of innocency which we are to strive after. I do not say, that we shall ever reach it; but by the help of God's Holy Spirit we may advance toward it: we may, and we ought all, to be ever getting nearer and nearer to it.

Nor does this scriptural expression of dying to sin, merely bespeak the completeness of the deliverance which the Christian ought to enjoy from the yoke and chains of Satan: it also denotes the painfulness and difficulty of our first steps in that deliverance. For we have steps to take toward that end; and sometimes very painful ones. Christ has not done so much for us, as to leave us nothing to do for ourselves. He is the door; but we must enter in at the door: he is the way; but we must walk along the way. He is our most merciful and only Saviour: but in such wise, that we have still a salvation to work out, and that too with fear and trembling. Now the beginning of this work of ours is often so painful, the struggle a man has to go through in parting with his sins is at times so hard, the wrench needed to tear him from his evil habits is not seldom so sharp, that the Gospel compares it to dying. After death, as you know, the body has

no sense or feeling. But before we can arrive at the quiet state of death, we must first die: and though death is calm and painless, dying is often difficult and painful. Many an ache must be undergone, many a struggle made, before the soul can work her way through the walls of the fleshly prison, in which she has grown and been shut up. Thus is it when a separation takes place between the soul and body; and thus too is it when a separation takes place between the soul and sin. Though the soul, when it has once broken away, and got loose from what held it captive, even from the chains of Satan, when it has escaped from the snare of the fowler, being free, is happy and at ease, still the exertion needed to make the escape, the effort to break the chain is often very trying: so that, though the being free from sin is a calm and peaceful state, which the Scripture compares to death, the getting free from it is oftentimes attended with such hard and grievous strugglings, that the Gospel likens it to dying.

Thus, you see, Christianity begins, where everything else ends. It begins with death. Death, which is the goal of all earthly things, is the starting-point in the christian race. We are to set out on our course toward God by dying unto sin. This however is only the beginning. It is good to get rid of sin. It is good at any

price to escape from the company of those miserable persons, who, as St Peter expresses it, are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. But, though this is good, so far as it goes, it does not go far enough. It is not enough to die unto sin, unless we live afterward unto righteousness.

For consider what death is. It is a state in which a man *can* do nothing. If he has no longer the power of doing wrong, he is equally without the power of doing right. The dead cannot serve God: for in death no man remembereth him; nor can any give him thanks in the pit. Nor can a dead man do anything for his fellow creatures: for there is no work, or device, or knowledge, or wisdom in the grave. What then is he good for? For nothing, but to be buried and put out of the way. Nor is death merely a useless state to be in: it is also a joyless state. If a man can do no good to others in the grave, neither can he receive any good in it himself. A corpse has no more feeling than a log of wood, and is just as incapable of enjoying pleasure, or any sort of happiness or satisfaction. Now can such a useless, such a joyless, such an insensible and loglike state, be a state that the Lord of life and happiness can take delight in? When God created the world, did he make it in a state of death?

Nay, the world was dead before; for an uncreated or unborn thing is all one as if it were dead. But God at the creation called it out of death, and gave, not to man only, but to all the kinds of animals, to the fourfooted beasts, and to the birds and fishes and insects,—to each of these at the creation God gave such a life as to his wisdom and goodness seemed fitting for them. It is life, and not death, that God delights in. It was to break the bonds of the grave, to rescue man from death, that Christ came down from heaven. Are Christ's people then to be exceptions to the great rule? Can we suppose that in their case, and in theirs only, God, who in all other things and creatures takes pleasure in life, and gives it, will be satisfied with a state of death? Did Christ come to redeem a dead people to himself? Far from it, my brethren: he came to bring us life, not in the next world only, but in this world also.

Therefore, after dying to sin, we are not to continue dead; but we are to be born again, as the Scripture calls it, and to begin living in good earnest. We are to live a christian life. You know what life is, better than I can tell you. You know it to be the opposite to death. Is death an inactive, a torpid, a useless state? a state in which a man can do no good? Life should be an active

energetic, useful state; and its business should be to do good. Such is life, and the business of it. What then is a christian life? It is a life in which all these things are done in a christian spirit. It is a life of which the activity, the energy, the usefulness, and the business are christian.

But I will set this before you in another light. Let us look at it with reference to Christ himself. He, being God on earth, led a divine life during his stay here. Now what proof did he give us of this life? You will tell me perhaps, that he healed the sick, that he raised the dead, that he calmed the raging of the sea, and did many other mighty works, such as no mere man can do. These however, though proofs of his possessing more than human power, are not the chief signs of his divinity. The greatest proof of that was his perfect union of heart and mind and purpose with the Father. It was his "meat," as he tells us, "to do the will of him that sent him," and to finish his work. This, my brethren, is the best proof which Christ gave, or indeed could give, that the life he led was divine. Would you lead a christian life? Lead such a life as Christ led. No life unlike his can be a christian life: and every life, in proportion as it comes near to his, will in that same degree be

christian. Our Saviour did not undergo all those grievous pains for us, merely that we should cease to commit sin. It is not for that negative, that slumbering, for that sluggish and inglorious virtue, that he has prepared the glories of his kingdom. He did not come to reign over the dead: nor was it any part of his purpose to people heaven with drones and sleepers. As his life on earth was active, as he spent his days in working the work of him that sent him, so must all Christians do Christ's work: and they must strive to do it as cheerfully, as faithfully, and as constantly, as Christ did the work of his Father.

Here in a few words you have an account of the outward signs of the christian life. The Christian is just as busy as other men; nay, often far busier. He is quite as painstaking, quite as careful to fit his means to his end; in a word, he is quite as much alive, as any groveling child of earth can be. The difference between them is, that the child of earth seeks his own glory, his own pleasure, his own advantage; while the Christian, who has been born again a child of heaven, toils and labours and tasks his mind for the glory of God, and for the good of his fellow-creatures. In the man of the world, self in some shape or other is uppermost: whereas in the Christian, in proportion as he is a Christian, that same hateful and greedy self is undermost.

This is one great difference between them. A second difference is pointed out in our text. The true Christian, being risen with Christ, seeks the things which are above: while the man who is no Christian at heart, whatever he may be in name, —and many, alas! are called Christians, may none of us be among the number! who have no more love for Christ, or thought about him, than the untaught heathens,—such men, I say, have all their thoughts and affections set on things below. Their plans, their views, their wishes and desires never rise an inch above the earth. To hear them speak, or see them act, one would suppose they had made a league with death, and had found some secret, known only to themselves, for sealing and stopping up the grave. One would imagine that they fancied themselves certain of living on for ever here; or at least that they were quite sure, if by any accident they should happen to die, of being never called to live again hereafter. Yet these are the worldly wise: at least so the world esteems them. Wisdom forsooth! What would these wise men say of a person, who knew that he was to start ere long on a journey to some distant country,—that he was to go, for instance, to the burning wilderness, where the water-springs are so rare and scanty, and the rays of the sun so scorching; or that he was to be sent

to some newly discovered and yet unpeopled land, where a man is sure to have a hard time of it, unless he takes a stock of needful things with him;—and yet the man, knowing all this, knowing that he must go sooner or later, knowing that he may be called to set out at a moment's notice, makes no preparation for his journey, is not even at the pains to acquaint himself with the nature of the country he is going to, consults no books, asks no questions, takes no steps to ascertain the soil and climate, to find out how to guard against any diseases which may prevail there, or how to lead a comfortable and happy life when he gets there,—what would the worldly-wise say of such conduct in any man? Would they esteem it wise? Would they not censure and ridicule it as arrant folly? Yet what is the improvidence of the traveler, who makes no preparations for his destined journey to the wilderness, or to the desert and unpeopled land, when compared with the carelessness and the madness of those self-admiring sons of worldly wisdom, who go on year after year without making a single preparation for death, and the judgment, which they must needs know will certainly come after death, who go on without a thought or care for heaven. The Christian, fool as the world considers him, has certainly none of this wisdom. He thinks it best to suit his

plans to his condition. Being aware that he is God's servant, he tries to live and act as becomes a servant of God. Knowing himself to be an heir of immortality, he is diligent to sow and foster in his heart the seeds of those christian graces, which are sure to outlive the grave. Trusting that he shall be admitted hereafter to dwell with Christ in heaven, he endeavours to prepare himself for that blissful state during the time he remains below, by seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of the Father.

Now what are those things? Generally we may be sure that, by the things which are above, must be meant all such heavenly things as can be brought down to earth and understood here. Therefore every feeling and every disposition, which can gain admittance into heaven, and meet with favour before God, must be included among those things which are above, and which the apostle commands us to seek.

And first undoubtedly comes holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. But what is holiness? It is the likeness of God in the soul of man. God is the Holy One: and they who are fashioned after the likeness of his image, must needs be holy also. "Be ye holy, as I am holy," is the rule which God has given us in his law (Levit. xi. 44); and Jesus, the Holy One of God,

has shewn us how we are to keep it. But you will tell me that no man can make himself holy; since holiness is the gift of the Holy Spirit of God. True, my brethren, most true. Yet still it is necessary that you should become holy: and holy you may become, although you cannot make yourselves so. For in the first place, you can abstain from all those unholy and sensual deeds, which St Paul reckons up in the Epistle to the Galatians, calling them works of the flesh. These works, drunkenness, revelings, uncleanness, and the rest, which are as opposite to holiness as darkness to light, and which stain and blacken the soul,—these foul and unholy works you can all abstain from. Indeed, if you are Christians in truth, as I said above, you must be already dead to all such things. Next, you can all pray for the help of the Holy Ghost. But God has promised the Holy Ghost to all who pray for that help earnestly. "If ye, (says Christ,) being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, much more will your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Therefore, if you pray for the Holy Ghost earnestly, he will come to you: if you continue to pray for him, he will dwell with you: and if he dwells with you, he will make you holy. Holiness then is one of the things above, which every Christian is to seek.

The second, which I shall mention, is love. God, St John tells us, is love: therefore, as God is in heaven, love must be in heaven; and heaven must be the abode of love. Hatred can no more gain admission into heaven, than murder: for he that hateth is a murderer; that is, in his bosom he cherishes that poisonous seed of ill-will and malice, which when ripened by provocation and opportunity, brings forth the deadly plant of murder. I do not say, that everybody who harbours a grudge against his neighbour, would be ready to kill him, if he could do it secretly. In very many cases such a wicked thought never crosses the hater's mind. Were he taxed with being a murderer, he would answer, as Hazael did, when the prophet Elisha told him of the cruel deeds he was about to perform, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great and horrible thing?" Do you think me so abominably wicked, so utterly lost to all sense and feeling of human kindness, as to commit this foul crime? Hazael at the moment thought he could not commit such a crime. Yet the very day after his return to the king of Syria, "he took a thick cloth and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died" (2 Kings viii. 15). In the same way, so deceitful is the heart, and, when unchecked by religion and by the Spirit of God, so prone to

every kind of wickedness, that the man who suffers himself to hate another, can never be sure where he will stop. He has the cockatrice-egg of murder in his bosom, an egg which by God's grace may never be hatched: but there it is; and, if a man allows his mind to brood on it, who can tell what mischief may ensue? Therefore God, who foreknows things before they come to pass, and who beholds the effect in the cause, the action in the motive, has declared that hatred is murder, because it is the root of murder; just as he has declared lust to be adultery, because it is the root and spirit of adultery. If the murderer of his neighbour will be shut out from heaven, so will the hater of his neighbour. If the first can gain no entrance into the new Jerusalem, neither can the other, until his hate be melted into love. Love then is one of the things above, which a Christian is to seek. But what kind of love? A real, sincere, hearty, earnest, fervent, active love, — a love "not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth,"—a love like the love of Jesus Christ, who went about doing good,—a love striving to be like him who left the glories of heaven to die on the cross for our sakes.

The third of the things above, which I would have you seek, is peace. Christ is the Prince of peace. When his warfare and ours against sin

is accomplished, when Sin and Death have been cast into the lake of fire, then will the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the peacefulness of Christ's kingdom be fulfilled, and peace shall be for ever upon the Israel of God. Those therefore, who would begin their heavenly life on earth, must be careful seekers after peace, avoiding all strife, shunning all bitterness and evil-speaking and contention, and even waging the war, which we are bound to carry on against wickedness, in a mild and peaceful spirit. For these are the Christian's surest arms,—forgiveness, gentleness, patience, steady and persevering kindness; and hard indeed must be the heart which they cannot pierce and subdue.

Lastly, we must seek truth. For God is truth, and loveth truth. All lies on the other hand, all manner of falsehood and deceit, all underhand tricks and juggling and cheating, come from the devil, from him who is a liar, and the father of lies.

Now observe how all these christian graces strengthen and support and fit and dovetail into each other, thus supplying what at first might seem wanting in that, so that by the union of them all the servant of Christ is thoroughly furnished and supplied for every good work. Might love and gentleness weaken the character, and unfit it for

walking in the rougher paths of duty, from fear of giving offense? We are commanded to follow after truth; and thus will that weakness be corrected. On the other hand, has truth a sternness, which might frighten sinners away, instead of winning them over and reclaiming them? We are charged, "if a man be overtaken in a fault, to restore him in the spirit of meekness" (Gal. vi. 1). Thus what might be too severe is to be softened by the gentleness of the affections; and what might be too weak is to be strengthened by upright straightforward principle. It is this union of principle and of love, of everything most zealous in action with everything most patient in endurance, that made up the perfect beauty of our Saviour's character, while he lived on earth; and if we are his people, his disciples, his followers, his brethren, we must endeavour to grow like-minded with him. If we are indeed risen with Christ, we must set our affections on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

SERMON XVII.

THE ASCENSION.

PSALM lxviii. 18.

Thou art gone up on high: thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men: yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

THE Psalm from which these words are taken, was written by David to celebrate the removal of the ark of God from the house of Obededom to Jerusalem. The fullest account of this event you will find in the 15th chapter of the first book of Chronicles, where we read that David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with joy. It must have been a glorious sight to see David, and the singers, and the Levites who were carrying the ark upon their shoulders, with its golden staves, all in their robes of fine linen, and then the thousands and tens of thousands who were

following with shouts and music. To see this procession moving up Mount Zion, to the sound of trumpets and psalteries and cymbals and harps, while the singers were singing with heart and voice the beautiful 68th Psalm, which David had written for this great occasion, must indeed have been a glorious sight, and one to make the heart of every pious Jew leap within him. But we are not Jews: the splendour of the Levitical service has passed away: the ark itself has perished: and so many things concern us more nearly than the Jewish feasts and ceremonies considered in themselves can do, that, if the 68th Psalm spake of nothing greater than the recovery of the ark from the Philistines, and the carrying it up the hill of Zion, beautiful as that Psalm is, I should not have gone to it for a text, at least at the present season. But we know from St Paul (Ephes. iv. 8), that it does speak of an event beyond all comparison greater and more interesting to us, and that, while David perhaps only meant to celebrate the bringing back of the ark of the covenant from a heathen land, and the bearing it triumphantly up the sacred hill, the Holy Ghost led him to sing of Christ's return to heaven after his abode on this wicked earth.

The same is the case with many other prophecies. We are not to suppose that the prophets in every instance knew that they were inspired to

speak of some great and distant event. In many cases they seem to have designed to write about the things which happened to interest the Jewish people at the time. But it was ordained by the Holy Ghost that their words should have a further meaning: so that what they said about matters near at hand, should be prophetical of greater matters afar off. Thus for example in the Song of Solomon, the immediate subject doubtless is the marriage of Solomon and his Egyptian bride. Still a greater than Solomon is there: and the union of our Saviour and his Church is the chief thing treated of. Thus too the 45th Psalm was probably also written in honour of Solomon and the Egyptian princess. But under the figure of this marriage the majesty and grace of Christ's kingdom, and its increase among the Gentiles, are the real things prophetically described. Thus again, when the heart of king Ahaz, and the hearts of his people were troubled by the tidings that the king of Syria and the king of Samaria were coming up to war against them, Isaiah was sent to comfort and assure them that the league should come to nothing. Now what was the sign promised? That "a virgin should conceive and bear a son, and that they should call his name Immanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us:" a prophecy which evidently points to the

coming of the Son of God in the flesh, and which cannot be said to have been fully accomplished until Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. Lastly, not to multiply examples, the very Psalm from which my text is taken, was certainly intended to celebrate the return of the ark of God to Jewry: and so it did: but it likewise celebrates the return of the Son of God to heaven.

Such prophecies are called double prophecies; because they relate to two things, one of them usually near at hand, and comparatively unimportant, the other far off, and of very great importance. Now a remarkable thing about these double prophecies,—and it well deserves notice, as being the clearest proof that they were inspired,—a remarkable thing in these double prophecies is, that the words used in them are often better suited to the more distant and greater of the two events, than to the matter which the writer himself had in view. So is it for example in the Psalm before us. Look at the words of the text; and you will find that they do not apply to the bringing back of the ark so closely, they do not fit it so exactly, nor describe it so faithfully, as they describe the ascension of our Saviour. For what is the first thing asserted in them of the ark? That it had gone up on high. And so it did, in a certain limited sense;

for the hill of Zion is a high hill. But what is the height of the hill of Zion, when compared to those highest heavens whereunto our Lord ascended? Of him then, far more than of the ark, can it be truly said that he went up on high. So with regard to the rest of the text,—"thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men; yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them,"—apply these words to the ark, and they seem too great for the occasion, glorious as that occasion was. Apply them to the ascension of the Son of God, and we feel them to be no more than the simple truth. For he did indeed lead captivity captive; he did indeed receive gifts from his heavenly Father to bestow on his enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

Is not this now passing strange and wonderful, that when a man means to speak of one thing, he should use words which are found to apply much more closely and accurately to something else, something at a great distance, something which in all probability the speaker little thought of? Wonderful it certainly is; and many would say, it is unaccountable. But we will not call it unaccountable: for we are able to account for it very easily. We know from St Peter (2 i. 20), that no prophecy is of private interpretation: that is, pro-

phecies were never meant by God to refer solely to the events of the times when they were spoken; but they pointed far into the future, to the coming of the Son of God. So that the prophets themselves did not understand them. They spake, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit: the words they uttered were not their own words, but such as God put into their mouths. Their tongues were guided and over-ruled by the Spirit of God himself, to bear witness to the divinity, to the birth, to the sufferings, and to the glories of the blessed Jesus.

Having thus explained the nature of these double prophecies to you, I shall lead you step by step through the particular prophecy in the text. It consists of four several parts. Thou hast gone up on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Each of these will furnish us with matter for a distinct head: the first two may be considered now; the others I must keep for another day.

First then, our Saviour has 'gone up on high:' that is, he went up from earth in his human form, and was exalted far above all creatures to the right hand of God the Father. I need scarce repeat, what I have said to you before, that, when we speak of the right hand of God, we use what is called a figure of speech. God is a Spirit. God

has no body, as we have: therefore he cannot have hands. Still the expression is a very good one, and not hard to be understood. We are assured by it that, just as an earthly king would place his favorite son next to himself on his right hand,—this being accounted the post of chief honour,—so the highest place in the universe, the greatest honour, the nearest and closest intimacy with the almighty and eternal Father, were all bestowed on Jesus after he ascended into heaven.

But how do we know this? We know it first from St Stephen, who, "being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God:" that is, he saw that bright and shining light, which was always understood by the Jews to betoken God's more immediate presence; and he saw Jesus standing at the side of it: "and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." Again we know it from St Paul, who, as he was journeying to Damascus before his conversion, on the way saw a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, the very light which Stephen saw, and called the glory of God; and he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And when Saul answered, "Who art thou, Lord?" the voice said to him, "I am Jesus." We know it also from several passages of the

New Testament, in St Matthew, in St Mark, in St Luke, in St Peter, and in St Paul's Epistles; in all which passages we are told plainly that Christ is seated at the right hand of God, at the right hand of power, at the right hand of the Majesty on high. That Christ went up into heaven, we likewise know, because the apostles saw him ascend. Hear St Luke's account of this, as it is written partly at the beginning of the Acts, and partly in the last chapter of his Gospel. "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and lifted up his hands and blessed them; and while he blessed them, he was parted from them; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, and said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Christ therefore ascended in a bodily shape: the man Jesus is gone up into heaven, and there, O great and wonderful exaltation! is sitting at the right hand of God.

Yet why do I call it a wonderful exaltation? If we look into the matter, we shall be satisfied, I think, that the ascension of our Saviour had nothing wonderful in it: and the same may be said

of his resurrection. For just consider who our Saviour was,—that he was the Son of God most high,—that he was Immanuel, or God with us,—that notwithstanding his merciful humility in taking our mortal form, he was that eternal Word, of which St John says, that in the beginning he was with God, and was God. How then can we wonder that this Divine Being, though he did vouchsafe to die for our sakes, though he allowed himself to be put to a shameful death,—can we wonder that his death should have been different from other deaths, and that his Father did not suffer him to lie unheeded in the grave? Hear what St Peter says on this point in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. "Him God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." (Acts ii. 25.) For God would never leave the human soul of his Son in the region of departed spirits; neither would he suffer the flesh of his Holy One to see corruption.

You hear what this great apostle says, that it was not possible for Jesus to be kept prisoner in the grave. At first, when the apostles were told of their Lord's resurrection, they deemed it an idle tale, because then they knew not the Scriptures. But when their understandings had been opened,

when Jesus had explained to them the various prophecies in the Old Testament about himself, and they had learnt to know that he was indeed the Son of God, then the truth flashed upon their minds: How could we be so ignorant as to suppose that death could get the mastery over the Prince of life? Hence they declare to the people in their very first sermon, that it was impossible, in the highest and deepest sense of the word, impossible according to God's justice, impossible according to God's love, impossible according to God's truth, impossible according to Christ's own divine nature, that he should not have risen from the dead. And having thus risen, what had he to do more on earth? The earthly purposes for which he came were accomplished. He had fulfilled the law of God by a perfect life: he had suffered the penalty of the law by a shameful death: he had been offered a spotless sacrifice and sin-offering for the sins of the world: he had provided his Church with teachers and with sacraments, to instruct and support his people: having done all this, he had completed his work below, and naturally went home to heaven. Wonder not then either at the Resurrection or the Ascension. It is not wonderful that the Lord of life should have burst the bonds of death. It is not wonderful that the Son

of God, after finishing his appointed task, should have gone back to his loving Father. The true wonder is, that he should ever have come down from heaven, that he should ever have been made man, that he should ever have died. The birth of Christ, and the death of Christ, his meekness in taking our nature upon him, his mercy in submitting to be crucified for our offenses, these are the things to wonder at, and not the Resurrection and Ascension.

I have said that Jesus, before his Ascension, had finished his appointed work. This brings me to the second head of my text, that he led captivity captive. For though Christ is in one sense the Prince of Peace, because he came to make peace between God and man, and to open a way for reconciling the truly penitent to their offended but still loving Father, yet in another sense he is the Captain of our Salvation; because in this world of sin and strife the only road to peace is through war. Hence our Saviour in many prophecies of the Old Testament is described as a mighty warrior: for instance in the 45th Psalm, where we read as follows: "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things: thy arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's

enemies." Here you see Christ represented as a captain going forth to war with sword and arrows. I need not remind you that, as the warfare spoken of was a spiritual warfare, so the weapons of that warfare were spiritual weapons. But the struggle was not the less real, nor the less dangerous on that account. It was a battle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness. With these had Jesus to contend from his birth to his death. He had to fight in the shape of man against those tyrannous enemies of man, sin and death. The first he conquered by his holy life: the last he conquered by his resurrection. This is called leading captivity captive; because, before the time of Jesus, sin and death were holding the human race captive in their hard bonds. These bonds Jesus brake: he threw open the prison doors, so that all who please may come forth: and then, having vanquished those who had vanquished all before, he ascended in triumph to heaven, leading the captors captive.

Sin and death then are both captives to Jesus Christ. But if they are captives to him, they are likewise captives to his servants. Therefore we need not fear them, provided we are his servants, not in name only, but in deed and in truth. How then is it that we so often hear Christians say-

ing, they cannot help this or that sin? In a heathen, or even in a Jew perhaps, such language might be natural and pardonable. But in a Christian, for whom Jesus has broken the strength of sin, and plucked out the sting of death,—in a Christian's mouth such language would indeed be strange, were it not so common that we forget how strange we ought to deem it. If you cannot help your sins, what are you better than the heathens? What has Christ done for you by leading captivity captive, if you remain still enslaved to sin? And if you cannot help your sins, it is evident you are slaves: for slavery is nothing but unwilling service. He whom his master can compell to serve him, whether he will or no, is the slave of that master; he therefore, who is compelled to serve sin, must needs be the slave of sin, and, if so, of Satan too. Reason and Scripture agree in this. Hence, when the apostles are recounting the benefits we have received from Christ's coming, they generally put in the first rank, that his victory has made us free from sin,—from sin, mind, and not merely from the punishment of sin. For men are apt to make a great mistake on this point. The deliverance they wish for is a deliverance from punishment. The deliverance which Christ offers them, is a deliverance from sin.

Are the hearts of any of you, my brethren, deaf to this offer? Do you feel that you do not care for it? The reason of this deafness, this coldness, is too plain. It is because you love your sin. If you love that, you cannot love Christ. Do not mistake my meaning. When I spoke of your being free from sin, I did not mean that you would at once be made perfect, that you would be set free from every sin, as soon as you became sincere Christians. Still less did I mean that you would be free from all temptations. You will still be forced to watch: you will be liable to surprises. You will have a constant struggle, a warfare to maintain. A child is not born with the strength of a grown man; but he goes on and grows from strength to strength. So is it with the Christian: he too must go on from spiritual strength to strength. He will have enough to exercise him till the end of his course. But the difference which has been brought about in his favour by Christ's victory, is that his warfare will now be full of hope. As in the last war, when an English ship met a French one of equal force, the sailors were fully aware that the Frenchman would not yield without a blow, and thus went into action, knowing they must have a battle and a struggle for it, but never doubting of the issue; so will it be in your warfare against sin. You will go to the battle, not indeed rashly, nor

unnecessarily, remembering that our Saviour has taught us to pray not to be led into temptation Much less will you enter into battle trusting in your own strength, lest God, who resisteth the proud, should permit you to fall before your enemies. But when the temptation comes upon you, and you are called to withstand it, you will not be afraid to meet it, even if it were as big as a Goliath, but will face it in the name of the Lord, who enableth us to overcome our enemies. The honour of the victory will indeed be due to Christ, through whose might alone you can be conquerors: but though the merit will be Christ's, and Christ's only, the rewards of his overcoming will be yours. For such is our Saviour's bountiful lovingkindness toward all who truly march under his banners, that he has made us these glorious promises by his servant in the Revelation: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death: and I will make him a pillar in the temple of God; and I will grant him to sit with me on my throne; and he shall inherit all things."

SERMON XVIII.

CHRIST'S DISINTERESTEDNESS OUR PATTERN.

PSALM lxviii. 18.

Thou hast received gifts for men.

IN my sermon on the first part of this verse, I shewed you that it contained a prophecy of our Lord's Ascension, and of his victory over sin and death. We saw how our Lord went up on high: we saw how he led captivity captive. The next thing declared of him in it is, that he received gifts for men: and this is the point on which I mean to speak to you to-day. It was the custom in ancient times, as it is now amongst us, that a victorious general, on his return from war, should be rewarded with great gifts, and tokens of favour and honour. To this custom we may suppose the Psalmist to refer in the first words of the text, coming as they do just after the mention of our Saviour's triumph and victory. Having

told us that Christ had gone up on high, and had led captivity captive, the text goes on to say, that he has received gifts, that is to say, such gifts and honours as are the rewards of victory.

Now, that Christ after his Ascension was indeed rewarded by God the Father with the greatest rewards, and honoured with the highest honours, we know most certainly from Scripture. He was seated at the right hand of God most high: a name was given him above every name: honour and majesty were laid upon him: he was set over all blessed for ever. All these rewards of victory our Saviour received. But these are not the gifts spoken of in the text. The honours and rewards I have just mentioned, were bestowed on our Saviour for himself: whereas the gifts in the text are said to be given to him for others. "Thou hast received gifts for men." So that a part of our Saviour's reward, for all he went through on earth, consisted in receiving gifts for men. But why do I say, a part of his reward? when this was in truth the whole of it. Everything which he received for himself on his Ascension, was merely a restoration to what was his own before. What new power or majesty or honour could be given to the Son after he took our flesh upon him, beyond what he had enjoyed from all eternity? When the Word became incarnate, he descended, he

stooped, he humbled himself, he came down from the highest summit of power and glory for our sakes. When his work on earth was finished, he went home again, and mounted until he reached the same glorious height from which he had come. But he could not go higher. He was God before he came to earth: could he become more than God, when he went back to heaven? God is incapable of increase. If Christ was God from the beginning, then from the beginning was he enjoying the utmost glory and power and happiness: and to that utmost nothing could be added. Nothing can be higher than the highest; nothing can be greater than the greatest; nothing can be more blessed than the most blessed. The man Jesus indeed was very highly exalted: for in him, as the Athanasian Creed expresses it, the manhood was taken into God. The human part of Christ, the part which he inherited from his Mother, became capable of being raised to glory and happiness unspeakable, and was so raised. But the divine part of Christ, which St John calls the Word, and which had dwelt in the bosom of the Father, could not receive any increase of glory or bliss, which must have belonged to him as God in their utmost fulness from all eternity. Therefore Christ, when he prayed to his Father the night before his Crucifixion to glorify him, did not ask for any new

glory; for that he could not have: he only asked to be reunited to the Father, and restored to the glory which he had always had: "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

But if this be so, if God the Son could receive no new honour and dignity after the Ascension, greater than he enjoyed before the Incarnation, what did he gain, if I may use such a word in speaking of God, what did he obtain, what was his reward and recompense for coming down to earth, and suffering so much during his stay here? My brethren, he gained our happiness. This was the only reward he looked to, and the only recompense he could have. The only gifts he did or could receive were for men. This is what sets the goodness of our Lord and Saviour in the strongest light. It shews that he underwent everything simply and purely for our sakes. We, if we are called on to give up anything for God, are lured to do so by great and precious promises. We are told that whatever we give up for his sake shall in the end be made up to us a hundredfold. We are assured that our light afflictions, which last but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Yet all this will not do. Notwithstanding all the rewards set before us, scarcely one in twenty can be

found to give up a single earthly passion, a single fleshly lust, a single foolish vanity, a single angry feeling, a single wrongful gain, a single sin, to the God who made, and to the Saviour who has redeemed us. But Christ gave up all the glories of heaven for a season, without the possibility of gaining anything for himself, merely to do us good. His coming was to save us. His dying was to atone for us. His very rewards for all his sufferings and humiliation, for his perfect obedience to his Father's will, and his glorious victory over his Father's enemies,—his rewards for all these things are gifts for men. My brethren, there are some blasphemers of God and our holy faith, who, because our heavenly Father has been pleased to promise his faithful people an eternal inheritance of glory, taunt us with serving God from interested motives, and charge the Gospel with teaching men to be selfish. This taunt is not a new invention. It is as old as the time of Job; of whom Satan, when he could find nothing else to bring against him, said, "Does Job serve God for nought?" But is the charge true? Is it true that the Gospel teaches men to be selfish? The Gospel teaches men to follow Christ. This is the sum of it. Do as Christ did; think as Christ thought; act as Christ acted. Was Christ selfish? Was it selfish in the only-begotten Son of God to

come down from his throne of greatness for the sake of us miserable sinners? Was it selfish in him to become the Son of man, and die a shameful death, that we might be made sons of God, and raised to a life of glory? Was he selfish, when the very prize of his victory is only gifts for men? Such is the selfishness which the Gospel sets before us,—to do everything, and to suffer everything, in obedience to God, and for the good of men. The Gospel rule, given us by Christ himself, is, that, as he hath loved us, so should we love one another. As he hath loved us: that is to be the measure of our love for one another. Therefore our love for each other should be without bounds: it should be a disinterested love: it should be a self-denying love: it should be a love not easily provoked. If it fail in any of these respects, it will be very unlike the love which Christ has left us for a pattern.

First our love should be without bounds. When it is in our power to do any real good for our neighbour, we must not shut our hearts against him with such thoughts as these,—"I have done enough for him already: I will do so much for him, and no more." If Christ had set any bounds to his love for us, where should we all be now? We need not be afraid that we shall go too far in serving others, unless we tie ourselves up not to go beyond a certain point. There is no danger

that any of us will ever go too far in the walk of active love. There is no likelihood that any of us will become too bountiful, too friendly, too kind, too helpful to his neighbour. Human nature will be sure to stop quite soon enough. The real danger lies the other way, lest we should stop too soon. For, though we are none of us likely to do too much for our neighbour, we are all of us likely to do too little. Therefore this is the danger we are to guard against.

But you will ask perhaps, are there then no bounds at all to the good we are to do for others? I answer, that, provided the good be a real good, and the doing it does not cross any plain duty, or break any express command of God, I know of none, and can find none in the New Testament. The good of course must be a real good: it must be such a good as true love would prompt us to do, and true wisdom would approve. Had we the riches of Solomon, we should not be called upon to give a guinea to every beggar or to clothe the children of the poor in silks and satins; not because the expense would be too great; but because, by so spending our money, we should be doing more harm than good. By giving a guinea to every beggar, we should be encouraging idleness; which is a bad thing: by dressing up poor children in rich clothes, we should give them a

fondness for finery; which is a bad thing. Therefore, the money so spent would be squandered foolishly and hurtfully, in fostering evil habits: and this of course we ought never to do. Nor are we called upon, or allowed, to do good to our neighbour to the neglect of any plain duty, or to the breach of an express command of God's. We must not go abroad to nurse a sick neighbour, when our mother is lying ill at home: because our duty to her comes first. We must not rob, for the sake of relieving a person in need: because God has said, "Thou shalt not steal." We must not tell a lie, to help a neighbour out of a scrape: because God has said, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." So we must not, under a mistaken notion of hospitality, make the people that come to our house drunk: because God has forbidden drunkenness; and we are not to put temptations in the way of others, nor to be partakers in other men's sins. This is the meaning of the command, that we are to love our neighbours as ourselves. All that we may do for ourselves, we are to do for him, if need be. But a thing which we are forbidden to do for ourselves, we are forbidden to do for him likewise, let him wish and ask for it ever so much. We must not get drunk ourselves; and therefore we must not make our neighbour drunk. We must not lie to screen ourselves; and therefore

we must not lie to screen him. We must not steal for ourselves; and therefore we must not steal for him either. In a word, we must not do wrong to please another person, any more than to please ourselves. Mark this, ye young women, who are so liable to be led into wickedness, under the sacred name of love: mark this, and do not allow your best and kindliest feelings, any more than your worst, to be turned into engines against your souls. But in everything right and good, in everything that reason approves, in everything that would be of real service to our neighbour's soul or body,—in these things we cannot do too much for him, if we would follow Christ: for Christ's love to us was boundless.

Moreover our love must be disinterested. We must not do a service to our neighbour, from a hope of getting back the same or greater in return. This would be trading and bartering, not loving. I do not mean, that we are to refuse to receive help and kindness on occasion from those whom we may have assisted. This would betoken a proud and sullen spirit. A man should know how to accept a favour, as well as how to bestow one. But in doing a kindness to another we ought not to count on a return. Much less ought we to narrow our kindnesses to such as are able to return them, but rather should rejoice to prove

the disinterestedness of our christian love, by doing good to the needy, who can make us no return, and even to the thankless, who will not. For so our Saviour teaches us: "If ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again: and your reward shall be great; and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind to the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke vi. 33—35).

Again, our love should be self-denying. What is the value of services which cost the doer nothing, in comparison with those which cost him pains and trouble? It is the pains a friend will take to serve you, the sacrifices he will make for your sake, that prove his love to be sincere. A man may do many kind things from good-nature and easiness of temper: but call on him to exert himself, to deny himself, to put himself to trouble, to undergo a little hardship and privation on your account; and you bring his affection to the trial. If it stand this test, you may trust it. What is true of friendship between man and man, is equally true of christian love. No deed in which there is not some sort of self-denial, can have any right to

the glorious name of a deed of charity. Here let me point out to you an advantage which the poor have in this respect, although perhaps few of them are aware of it. It is an easier matter for a poor man to be charitable, than for a rich man. "What! (you exclaim) how can a poor man be more charitable than a rich man? when the rich man may give away his hundreds, or, if he is very rich, his thousands, and not miss them; while a poor man cannot even give a penny or a crust of bread, without feeling the loss: he cannot even go to help or nurse a friend, without forfeiting a part of his wages." True: and for this very reason,—because a poor man cannot do any service to his neighbour without some loss, some self-denial,—is it easier for him to shew the sincerity of his christian love. He who for Christ's sake shares his one loaf with the hungry, casts more into the treasury, than they who out of their abundance scatter hundreds or thousands they will never miss. I know, when one hears anybody called charitable, one takes it for granted that he must have plenty of money: and it is a very rare thing to hear poor persons so called. Yet I trust it is not rare for them to be so. Piteous indeed would be the condition of the poor, if their poverty shut them out from the noblest privilege which God has bestowed upon mankind, the privilege of helping each other,

the privilege of shewing christian charity in the various exercises of brotherly love. But it does not. If any of you have ever fancied that, because you are poor, you have nothing to give, and that the duties of christian charity do not concern such as you, drive such a notion out of your minds. The poorest of you may do as much,—what in God's eyes will be accounted as much,—as the richest can do. You of your poverty may give your all; and they at the utmost can do no more. This however they may do too. They may make sacrifices in various ways, though not so easily as you can. They may shew their love by giving their time, by giving their labour, by giving their thoughts, by giving up their tastes, by giving up their prejudices. They too may go forth, like St Paul: though the weakness of men now-a-days will hardly come near the graces of that holy apostle, they too may go forth in the service of Christ to minister to their brethren, "in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings and cold." That is to say, there is no outward hindrance to keep them from doing so. If the love of Christ burns in their hearts, as it did in his, they may do so. Nay, unless they do this in one way or other, unless they deny themselves for the love of Christ and of their brethren, the love of Christ and of their brethren has no place in their hearts.

One way in which this self-denial must be shewn, is in overcoming our passions. Our love must not be easily provoked. Charity, the apostle tells us, suffereth long, and is kind. It takes its pattern from the long-suffering of Christ. Ever since the fall of Adam the sins of mankind had been provoking God to wrath: yet God would not be provoked, save to a far more exceeding and wonderful display of his love. Instead of baring the arm of his vengeance, and cutting us off in our iniquity, he stretched forth the arm of his mercy, and sent his Son to bring us back to the fold. It is only when love will not be provoked, except to fresh deeds of love, that it proves itself to be pure, and thoroughly disinterested, and to spring from the only pure source, the love of God and of Christ. For even the natural man desires to be loved by his brethren, and will love them for the sake of gaining their love: but when the natural man finds that his love is only met by thanklessness, it fades and dies. Christian love on the other hand in its outward workings is like God's love: it embraces the thankless as well as the thankful. Nay, as God has done more for sinners, than ever could have been done for man, if he had continued in righteousness, so will christian love be most active and diligent in trying to soften and win the hearts which need it the most.

Such must be our love, if we would shape it into any likeness to Christ's love for us, of which at best it can never be more than a very faint and lame copy. For his love was truly boundless; ours will be cramped and hemmed in on every side by the weaknesses and wants of our nature. His love was perfectly disinterested; ours is evermore disturbed by the wish for some manner of return. He gave up the glories of heaven; we can only give up a little of the dross of earth. He forgave sins without number and excuse; we can only forgive what we have no right to resent. Feeble however and unworthy as our love may be, it is the only return we can make to Christ; and as such, Christ vouchsafes to accept it. The love which we shew to our brethren, he vouchsafes to accept as shewn to himself. "Inasmuch as ye have done it," he says, "to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me." The one object for which Christ came down on earth, was to make men holy and blessed. The one reward which he received when he went home to heaven, was gifts for men, to make them holy and blessed. This then, my brethren, if we love Christ, is what we must strive to do for Christ. We must strive to work under the guidance of his Spirit, in order to win souls for him, in order to help our brethren on along the road of holiness and blessedness.

In this work we may all do something: in this work every Christian may be a fellow-labourer with Christ. Christ's reward on his Ascension, I have said, was the bestowing gifts on men. But that is only for a time, only as the means toward the reward which he will receive on the last day. That will be his true reward, the reward for the sake of which he died, the reward for the sake of which he is still ever giving gifts to men. In the day when he makes up his jewels, in that day will the souls of all those whom he has redeemed be gathered into a crown of glory around his eternal head. Every soul that is saved will be a jewel in Christ's crown: every soul that is lost will be a jewel out of Christ's crown. Wo then, bitter wo, to those through whose fault a jewel is lost out of Christ's crown! How will they dare make answer, when he asks them, Where are my jewels? Blessed on the other hand, most blessed on that day, will they be, through whose patient endurance in christian love any jewels for Christ's crown have been gained.

SERMON XIX.

CHRIST'S GIFTS.

PSALM lxviii. 18.

Thou hast received gifts for men: yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

IN my last sermon on this verse I set before you the wonderful goodness and love manifested by our Lord and Saviour in coming down from heaven so entirely for our sakes, that his very rewards were gifts for men. He went through all, and bore all, not for the sake of receiving, but of giving, that he might as it were earn the privilege of bestowing greater graces and blessings upon us. But we shall take an imperfect view of our debt to him, unless we consider for whom Christ received these gifts, for whom he made so great a sacrifice,—namely, for his enemies. This is the point which the apostles urge so strongly, as the most wonderful and convincing proof of God's boundless love. Thus

St Paul says in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: "While we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly. Now scarcely for a righteous man will one die." Scarcely, he says: because one or two might perchance be found with courage enough to die for the sake of a good man and a good cause. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Again a verse or two after, "when we were enemies,"—the very word the Psalmist uses,—"we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." And again in the Epistle to the Ephesians, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ: for ye were strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, but now ye are made nigh to him by the blood of Christ" (ii. 4. 12). St John's words in his first Epistle are to the same purpose. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love;"—or this is the great, the astonishing proof of God's love,—that "before we loved God, God loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Truly, if we would give our minds to the mat-

ter, we must needs esteem it a very wonderful act of lovingkindness on the part of the great ruler of heaven and earth, to come to us poor worms, and entreat us to make peace with him. For to this it amounts. The Gospel message is, be ye reconciled to God. The Gospel doctrine is, that Christ came down from heaven, and died on the cross, in order that God, without doing violence to his holiness and justice, might hold out the sceptre of his mercy to us, and call us to him, and bid us live,—yea, live for ever,—and might offer us the countless treasures and endless blessings of his kingdom. This is the Gospel doctrine, that "God so loved the world,"—that world which we are told in another place, lieth in wickedness,—"that he gave his only begotten Son, to the intent that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16).

Now does not this love far surpass anything we could ever have dared to hope for, if God had not plainly set it forth in Scripture? Put the case of yourselves: are you so ready, even when you are in the wrong, to go to a neighbour and ask him to make it up with you? Yet God, who can never be otherwise than right, comes to us, and stretches out his merciful hands to us, and begs us to be reconciled to him, and to accept his pardon, and to

cease from sinning against him, and to come to him for the gifts which his Son will give us here, and for the ten thousand other more glorious and precious gifts which are laid up for us above. The Son too himself is always saying to you,—yes, he says to you at this moment by me, his minister,—"Do not go on sinning in this headstrong way; take pity on yourselves; do not force me to condemn you; accept the forgiveness, and the graces and gifts of all kinds, which I have purchased for you with my blood. Do not stand aloof, because you feel yourselves to be sinners, and because you know that you have behaved like the enemies of God. Even if you are enemies, come: yea, come boldly. Even for my enemies have I received these gifts. Sinners, enemies, come for them, and take them."

Can any message be fuller of gracious love, than this which I have just delivered to you in the name of my Master Jesus? And can you bring yourselves to reject it? Can you find it in your hearts to say, "Christ may hold out his hand to me; but I will not take it: he may call to me; but I will not come: he may knock at my door; but I will not open it: I will have none of his gifts: I will continue his enemy: I will not be reconciled to God?" If you heard a man saying such things with his mouth, what would you think of him?

Would not you be shocked, and tremble for him, and be almost ready to fall down on your knees and pray God to forgive him his horrid words and wicked thoughts? My brethren, there are two ways of saying a thing. A man may say,—I will not be reconciled to God,—with his lips; and you would shudder at his daring. But he may also say,—I will not be reconciled to God,—with his life: and if he is living in sin he does say so. Every man who is living in sin says, as plainly as deeds can speak, I will not be reconciled to God *now*. He may not always mean to say so, but he does say it notwithstanding; nay, and often means it too. When a man says, "I will repent and become religious next year," is not this the same as saying, "I will not become religious now. I will not make my peace with God as yet; I will go on in my rebellion against him a while longer?" Do not deceive yourselves, beloved brethren: open your eyes, and see the truth. The wicked man is God's enemy. He then who chooses to continue in wickedness, chooses to continue God's enemy. But why do I speak of continuing in wickedness? as if gross wickedness were necessary to prove a man to be at enmity with God. The Scripture rule is clear: he that is not with me, is against me. He that is not with Christ, he that has not come to him, and is not serving him, that

man is against Christ; and therefore he is against God. Against God! are any such here present? Alas! I fear there must be. I cann flatter myself that every one who hears me is sincerely striving to please God; and if you are not, you are God's enemy. Young or old, it matters not,—richer or poorer, it matters not,—man or woman, it is the same thing,—if you are not striving to serve God, you are God's enemy, in a christian church,—God's enemy, with the cross on your forehead,—God's enemy, with the grave, and the pit below the grave, ready to catch you, and opening their jaws wide for you, like wild beasts gaping for their prey. Shall we not shudder for you then, seeing you hanging by one single little thread of life, which an accident any hour may snap asunder? Yet by that one thread, if you are God's enemy, you are hanging over the pit of hell. Tremble, tremble for yourselves: hasten to lay hold on the pardon and grace which Christ offers you: pray to him for those gifts, which the text tells us he has received for his enemies. But pray to him in good earnest, like a person who feels he is praying for his life,—as the disciples prayed when the storm overtook them, and they cried, "Lord, save us! we perish;" —as Peter prayed, when he was beginning to sink, and cried, "Lord, save me!"—as the Ca-

naanitish woman prayed, who would take no denial: so pray thou. I say unto thee, whoever thou art, whose conscience tells thee that thou art God's enemy, pray thou with the same fervour as these did; and the same Jesus, who stilled the raging storm, and upheld the sinking Peter, and cast out the unclean spirit from the Canaanitish woman's daughter,—will hear thee, and will help thee, as he helped them, and will pluck thee out of the mire of wickedness, and will deliver thee from the evil one, and will still the raging passions in thy breast, and will reconcile thee to thy offended Maker, and turn thee from an enemy into a penitent and obedient son.

Christ's reward, we have seen, consisted in receiving gifts for men; and that too at a time when the whole world were strangers and aliens from God; nay, when, by following their lusts and the evil devices of their hearts, all mankind were at enmity with God; when they had set up other gods in the place of him who is the only God, and paid these all the worship and service which are rightfully due to him. Such was the state of the whole earth at Christ's coming: and even now such is the state of all those parts of it, where the religion of Christ has not yet taken root. It is of great importance to bear this in mind: because it proves that the whole of our salvation from first to

last is the work of Christ's free and gracious love. Man neither did, nor can do anything to deserve it, or to give him any sort of claim upon God for it. Mankind were not walking toward God, when Jesus came to seek them: they had turned their backs on God, and were walking away from him. It is true, they had not the same advantages as we have now: they did not know their duty so clearly as we do now. They were living under a kind of twilight; for the Sun of Righteousness was not yet risen. But they had not made the most, or near the most, of that twilight. The heathens had not profited as they ought to have done, or anything like it, by the light of nature. Full of holes and flaws as their philosophy was, it was amply enough to condemn them. Nor had the Jews profited as they ought to have done, or anything like it, by that treasure of theirs, the Old Testament. As the light of nature condemned the heathens, so the Old Testament condemned the Jews. Both had neglected and abused the means which God had afforded them for becoming wise and good. But, blessed be God! he did not forsake or cast off his sinful creatures, nor leave them to walk in their own darkness. Although they ran away from him, he only followed them the more: or rather he fetched a compass about, and came and met them in their wanderings. You

remember the parable of the wicked husbandmen in the 21st chapter of St Matthew. They paid their lord no rent for the vineyard he had let to them; and when he sent his servants for his share of the fruits, they beat the servants, and stoned them, and killed them. Now call to mind how their Lord treated them after all these wicked outrages. He did not turn them out of their farm, and punish them as they deserved: but he determined to give them another chance, and that a better than ever. He sent his son to them, saying, "They will reverence him." This parable is an exact setting forth of God's dealings with mankind, in calling them, when they were enemies, to a knowledge of his merciful Gospel. We had been unfaithful in a few things; yet God entrusted us with many things. We had misused our means and opportunities: yet God said, "Your opportunities and means shall be increased tenfold." We had shut our ears against all the teachers sent into the world in former ages; nay, the Jews had been deaf to the voice of God himself, speaking to them from the top of Sinai: and God said, "What shall we do with man? I have sent him teachers of his own flesh and blood, and have enlightened them with my Spirit, and have given them the word of power; yet man will not repent and come to me. I have spoken to him myself out of a cloud

on Mount Sinai, and have set my law plainly before him; and yet he cleaves to his iniquity. Still I will not utterly forsake him: one more trial is left for him in the counsels of my mercy. I will go to him myself: yea, the only-begotten of my love shall go and dwell with him in his own form; yea, in the form of a man shall he dwell with him. It may be he will hearken to him. Surely he will reverence my Son."

But they, who had always been enemies and rebels against the Father, now became the enemies of the Son. His meekness, his gentleness, his purity, his lovingkindness, his whole life spent in doing good to them, could not soften the hardness of their hearts. They laid hands upon him and slew him. They persecuted him during his life; and at length they nailed him as a criminal to the cross. Still even this did not move him to cast away his merciful purpose. While he was hanging on the cross, he conquered sin: and that victory he gained for his enemies. When he was laid in the grave, he conquered death: and this victory again was for his enemies. When he went up on high, he received gifts from the Father: and these gifts too were all for his enemies, for those very enemies whose sins had nailed him to the cross.

What however are those gifts, which Christ

has received for his enemies? This is the last question which remains for us, in order to fill up our view of this great and blessed subject. These gifts, so far as the Bible enables us to understand their nature, may be divided into two classes: the first consists of such gifts as Christ offers to men, while they are still his enemies; the second, of such as he bestows on those whom he has reconciled to God.

The gifts in the former class, which Christ offers to men while they are still his enemies, are two. But those two gifts are so excellent, that the happy man on whom they are bestowed has all that can be necessary for turning him from God's enemy into God's friend. He that has indeed received these two gifts into his heart, has ceased to be God's enemy: and so he comes within the circle of those further gifts, which are designed for such as are reconciled to God. Now what are these two excellent and wonder-working gifts, which have power to turn all such as receive them in a right spirit from God's enemies into God's friends? St Peter tells us in the fifth chapter of the Acts, where, speaking to the Jewish council, he says of Jesus, "Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Repentance and forgiveness of sins then, forgiveness as soon as we

repent, and the power to repent in order to our forgiveness, are the two gifts which Christ offers to men, while they are still enemies to God.

In the first place, he offers them forgiveness as soon as they have repented. So long as sinners continue in their sins wilfully, obstinately, and against their better knowledge, so long there can be no forgiveness for them. Christ has not procured our pardon, to the end that we may keep on sinning: but he has obtained the assurance of our pardon the moment we forsake our sins. He offers the fullest forgiveness to all his enemies, as soon as they repent and turn to God.

"And what boots, what avails such an offer to me?" many a sinner's heart will murmur: "what am I the better for being promised forgiveness after I have repented, when I feel too deeply I cannot repent?" To tear up all pretense for such a murmur by the roots, and to leave the sinner wholly without excuse, if he continues at enmity with God, Christ to his first gift of forgiveness adds a second gift of repentance. Not only will he forgive the sinner who repents: he will also enable him to repent, in order that he may be forgiven. Suppose one of you owed a rich man a hundred pounds; and that, instead of selling your goods, and throwing you into prison, he were to offer to forgive you the whole sum, on

condition that you would thank him in writing, and give him a promise under your hand never to run in debt again. In such a case some of you would say, "Sir, your offer is very kind: but it will do me no good: for I cannot write." Now suppose the rich man were to answer: "Well then, I will teach you to write; and when you have learnt, you may give me the written promise which I ask." This twofold kindness on the part of the rich man,—in offering to forgive you your debt, if you would but thank him in writing, and in teaching you to write, that you might be able so to thank him,—is a sort of picture of our Saviour's goodness to his enemies, in not only promising them full pardon on their repentance, but enabling them likewise to repent that they may obtain the pardon.

Repentance and forgiveness then are the first two gifts which Christ offers to every sinner. If he accepts them, if he does indeed repent, if he seeks the forgiveness which is granted to all such as seek for it earnestly, his offenses are blotted out, his debt is canceled; he is changed from an enemy into a child of God; and is let in and becomes entitled to a share in the privileges which Christ bestows on his people. But if the sinner does not accept these gifts, if he slights God's proffer of forgiveness, if he scorns the help which

would enable him to repent, then does he continue an enemy to Christ, and a rebel against God: and as such, when the day of judgement comes, he will be delivered to the executioner. Therefore once more I call upon you, and say to you: Sinners, enemies of God,—if there be any such amongst us,—hasten to accept the repentance and forgiveness which Christ so mercifully sets before you. The repentance and forgiveness, I say: for you must take both, or neither. Christ will not part his two gifts. You must take them both; or you must leave them both: you cannot have one without the other. Unless you repent and turn to God, you will not, you cannot be forgiven.

Suppose however that we have profited by these first gifts, and through them been reconciled to our heavenly Father, then has Christ a second and larger class of gifts, to forward us in the way of holiness, and to bring us into the presence of God. For such is our Saviour's bounty, that nothing can set limits to his gifts, except our unfitness to receive them. If your heart be large, your thirst great, if your prayer to him for grace be fervent, you will receive more: if your heart be small, your thirst little, your prayer faint, you will receive less. Therefore St Paul exhorts to covet the best gifts; because, in proportion to the strength of our desires, will be the gifts bestowed on us.

Of these spiritual gifts, which you ought to covet, the chief is the new heart and the new spirit, which are the mark of God's true children. None can be truly a child of God, unless he has been born of God. Now he that is regenerate, or born again of God, receives what the Bible calls a new heart. Thus it is written in the book of Ezekiel: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgements, and do them." The meaning of this promise is clear: and the gift is one of the most precious that can be bestowed on man. A new heart! · Much need in truth have we of a new heart: for the old one is bad enough. "Out of the heart (says our Saviour) proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, an evil eye, blasphemies, pride, foolishness" (Mark vii. 21, 22). Ought we not to long to get rid of such a heart, and to receive a different heart in its stead? a heart pure and loving, kind and gentle, true and humble, holy and pious,—a heart that covets heavenly treasures, and does not vex itself about the pelf, the amusements, or the honours, which the old-hearted world are gasping after.

The new heart and new spirit, which Christ gives to his people, must surely be very precious.

Nor can you be ignorant what is meant by it. Nicodemus indeed, when our Lord told him that man must be born again, was simple enough to ask, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" But none can be so simple now-a-days. Were such a question to be asked by any one now in a christian land, it could only be out of mockery and profaneness. When the Bible or the preacher speaks to you of this new heart and new spirit, none of you can be at a loss to understand, that by the new heart is meant a new feeling, leading to such a change in our affections,—and by the new spirit a new principle leading to such a change in our conduct,—that the alteration could scarcely be greater if we were made altogether anew. What then is this new feeling? what is this new principle? which Christ is ready to bestow on every one, when he has accepted his offer of pardon, and has forsaken his sinful courses, and is trying to live as the Gospel commands, and has begun to pray regularly, and to read his Bible, and to listen to sermons,—when, in short, he has taken all those first steps which betokens a man's repentance, and shew that he is anxious about his soul. A man in this state will soon find how incapable he is of attaining to that inward purity and truth, which the law of God

requires. Outward acts of sin he may get to abstain from; though even that, if he has been accustomed to any sinful practice, will cost him many a hard struggle. But purity of heart, meekness, patience, lowliness,—these, his Bible tells him, are the things which God looks for: and will he attain to these by his own efforts? Alas! he will soon find that, while the law is spiritual, he himself is carnal. He will find that, much as his reason and conscience may approve God's law, his fallen and corrupt nature is too strong for him. He will feel it hanging like a clog about his soul, and keeping it from rising up to heaven. If any of you, my brethren, are in this state, a state which St Paul describes so touchingly in the 7th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans,—if any of you are ready to cry out in the bitterness of your heart, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—remember St Paul's answer: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." God is ready to deliver you from your thraldom through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is waiting to be gracious, if you will only ask him. Therefore, instead of despairing, and giving yourselves up for lost, and slackening your prayers as of no avail, redouble them. Pray to Christ your King; tell him that you need his gifts, that you need a new heart, that you need a new spirit; beseech him for his

mercy's sake to send them to you, that you may be delivered from the bondage of your evil nature. Pray thus to our Lord and Saviour; and be assured, he will hear you, and ere long will send you the new feeling and the new principle which are to change and better your nature.

This brings me back to the question which I asked a while ago: what is this new feeling and this new principle, which are powerful enough to work such wonders, as to change the very wishes of our hearts, and to make our thoughts and lives savour of heaven? The principle is faith, that faith in praise of which St Paul is so full and frequent. A degree of faith, which we will call belief, the Christian must of course have from the outset. He would never have left the service of sin, unless he had believed that the wages of sin is death. The threats which God denounces against the wicked, must have made an impression on his mind: else he would never have taken the pains of breaking off his evil habits. So must he have believed that God hears prayer: else he would not have prayed. He must have believed the Bible to be the word of truth, and must have been led by what is called the preventing or guiding grace of God,—that grace which comes and knocks at the sinner's heart, to rouse him from his deadly slumber,—he must have been led by that grace to

apply the threatenings of the Bible to himself, and thus to feel his danger. This degree of belief every sinner must have, before he will begin to shake off his sins. But this is a very different thing from that mixture of belief and trust, which makes up a saving faith. Of this more perfect faith it is not too much to say, that it is strong enough to carry a man through all dangers, through all hardships, through all temptations, through all distresses, for the sake of him in whom we believe. In the words of St John, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John v. 4).

But if this principle be not sufficient for us, Christ has another equally powerful gift in store, in the shape of a new feeling to purify and strengthen our hearts, just as faith enlivens and strengthens our souls. This new feeling is love, the love of God, which marks the new-hearted or christian man, just as the love of self marks the old-hearted or worldly man. Now this love and this faith may exist in Christians in almost every degree. There are babes in Christ, as well as grown men. But even babes live, and have a spirit and principle of life in them, and learn to love their father and mother, long before they have learnt to say so. Thus must it be with babes in Christ. Even they must have a principle of

faith and a feeling of love toward God. If they have not, if they have not this new spirit, and this new heart, which always goes along with it, the christian life has not even begun in them. Judge therefore yourselves, brethren, and examine yourselves, whether you really love Christ, whether you have a hearty trust in God. Unless you have these only certain signs of a christian life in you, your Christianity is a dead letter and an empty show.

I feel sure however that some at least among you have these signs of a true christian life. Let us go on therefore a step further, and see what other gifts you are to look for. The Scriptures speak of many such, the gift of Christ's flesh, which is the Christian's food,—the gift of Christ's peace, which is the Christian's balm,—the gift of Christ's joy, which is the Christian's sunshine,—and finally the gift of an eternal inheritance, which is the Christian's reward and haven. But the largest gift of all, the gift in which all the others are embraced, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. "It is expedient for you," said our Saviour, "that I go away: for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you" (John xvi. 7). To him is committed the whole work of our sanctification. It is he, the Holy Ghost, that makes us holy. He gives us that

holiness, without which no man can ever see God. This indeed is the gift which the Psalmist seems to have had chiefly in view: for to this end, he tells us, did Christ receive gifts for men, "that the Lord God might dwell amongst them." Yes, my brethren, so wonderful is the lovingkindness of our Almighty Father, so precious the gift which Christ has obtained for us, that the Holy Spirit of God has vouchsafed ever since to come down and dwell amongst us; and not only amongst us, but *in* us, in all such as come to Christ with a simple and faithful heart. For this is what St Paul says to the Corinthians (1. iii. 16): "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" This question, which St Paul put to the church of Corinth, I put to you: know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? Beware therefore, dear brethren, lest ye defile the temple of God, by anything impure or sinful, whether in thought or word or deed: "for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."

SERMON XX.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HEAVEN,

OR,

REST IN ACTION.

HEBREWS iv. 11.

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.

THE rest here spoken of is the rest of the people of God. It is the rest to which the Son of God ascended, after his earthly task was accomplished, and which for the sake of his Son God has promised to all such as truly turn to him and obey him. In a word, it is the blessed rest of heaven. Now what is the nature of this rest, which is held forth to us in the Bible as so precious an inheritance? or, which amounts to the same thing, what is the nature of the rest which Christ is now enjoying in heaven?

That our Saviour's state in heaven deserves to be called rest, we know from Isaiah, who foretells

(xi. 10) that "his rest shall be glorious." St Paul speaks of him as sitting on the right hand of God. He is sitting, if I may so say, on a throne of glorious rest: and though our rest hereafter will be far less glorious, yet doubtless it will be of the same sort. As is the rest of the only-begotten Son now, such will be the rest of God's adopted sons hereafter; such in kind, I mean, though infinitely below it in degree. If Christ's be a rest without action, ours will be without action too. But if his be not without action, we may presume that our heavenly rest will not be without action either.

What then do we know of the rest to which Jesus ascended, after his conquest over sin and death? We may compare it to the rest of a prince, who returns to his father's court after conquering a distant kingdom. Of such a prince it might truly be said, that he is at rest from the toils and perils of war. He has exchanged danger for safety, turmoil for quiet, war for peace. In all these respects he is enjoying rest. Still it is a rest in the midst of which he may have a great deal to do. His business at home may be very different from that during his wars abroad: but business it still is, and business too that must be minded. Suppose the king, his father, as a reward for his services and victories, should entrust him with the

management of the conquered country: what a load of business would this bring upon him! He would have to gain and secure the hearts of his new subjects: he would have to watch over their welfare: he would have to set wise and prudent governors over them: he would have to teach them the language and manners and laws of his own people: he would have to encourage commerce and every sort of friendly intercourse between his father's former dominions and these new ones, for the sake of uniting the two as closely as possible: he would have to guard and provide against invasions and rebellions, lest his enemies should take advantage of his absence to begin the war afresh, and his new subjects should rise and join them. Moreover he would be the properest person to present their petitions, and to explain their wants, to the king, his father: and if notwithstanding all he could do for them, and all the good he could bestow on them, they did rebell, he would have to plead their cause, and to sue for their pardon, as soon as they had laid down their arms, and returned to their allegiance.

Such are some of the duties which, we may conceive, would fall to the share of an earthly prince, on his coming back to his father's court after conquering a distant kingdom. Such too,—if we only put heavenly things in the room of earthly,—such,

as we know from Scripture, have been the offices of Christ since he sat down at the right hand of power. In his character of our Lord and King, he has been ruling the Church, and preserving it from a thousand dangers: as our Priest, he has been ever offering up and presenting our prayers to God the Father: and as our Mediator, he has been making intercession for his people, and mercifully stopping the blow which their sins must else have brought down on their heads.

I say, we know from Scripture, that our Saviour, since his ascension, has been wielding these very offices. We know that he is a king. St Peter tells us (Acts v. 31), that God hath exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour; and St Paul says (Phil. ii. 9), that God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, to which all knees must bow in token of adoration and obedience. The same apostle tells us farther (Eph. i. 20), that God hath set him in heavenly places far above all principality and power, and hath put all things under his feet. Again, the prophet Daniel says (vii. 13), that he saw one like the Son of man come with the clouds of heaven; and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. Lastly, in the Revelation (xix. 16), Christ is plainly called King of kings, and Lord of lords:

and in the first three chapters of that book he is represented as exercising his sovereignty by ruling over the Church.

That Christ is our Priest, to offer up our prayers, we also know. In the Epistle to the Hebrews (ii. 17), he is called a merciful and faithful High Priest; and his going up into heaven is compared (ch. ix.) to the solemn entry of the Jewish high priest into the holy of holies: for, as the Jewish high priest was wont to go in once a year, and to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy-seat, so Christ has presented his own blood before his heavenly Father, to the full obtaining of mercy for us. It is because we are blessed with this merciful High Priest, that we are exhorted (iv. 16) to come boldly to the throne of grace. In the Revelation too our Saviour,—for the angel spoken of in the eighth chapter is supposed to mean Christ,—is described as standing, like a priest, at a golden altar before God's throne, and offering up the prayers of the saints with much incense; the incense being Christ's merits, which alone can make our prayers acceptable.

That Christ is also interceding for us, is plainly declared by St John (1. ii. 1), who tells us, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The same thing is set forth in the Epistle to the Romans (viii. 34),

where St Paul, as if carried out of himself by the glorious mystery, breaks out into that noble burst, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

Moreover Christ has cleared away all those hindrances and obstacles which were blocking up the road to heaven, and has made a new and living way for us, that, where he is, his people may be also. Nor has there been any age in which he has not sent forth a few chosen servants, with the piety and zeal almost of apostles, to preach his truth in its purity, and by the holiness of their lives to set forth the excellence and beauty of his doctrine; so that nothing either of teaching or example might be wanting to draw men to embrace the Gospel, and, I had almost said, to force them to be saved.

Not that these are all the offices, or a thousandth part of the offices, which the Son is discharging in his heavenly kingdom. For all things, not merely the affairs of this little ball of a world,—it is no more than a ball in comparison with the greater works of God,—all things have been committed to the incarnate Son, the Almighty Father alone excepted. Think what an *all* this is. Think of the hundreds of stars which we see on a frosty night: and there are millions, yes, millions more, which we

cannot see with the naked eye, and which can only be discovered by the help of glasses. These stars, there is every reason for believing, are so many suns, each of them giving light to his own train of worlds, just as our sun gives light to us. Now we cannot suppose that God has made all these numberless mansions untenanted and empty. Doubtless he has peopled them with different kinds of creatures, fitted in their several ways to do him service. If so, the government of all these millions of worlds, and of all the countless multitudes of creatures that inhabit them, is laid upon the shoulders of Christ. For St Paul says that all things are put under him: so that he rules them all. Such have been our Saviour's offices ever since he ascended into heaven: from which you may see that heaven is anything but a place of idleness.

Some, I believe, think of heaven in no other light than as a place of rest. Now a place of rest, in many senses of the word, heaven undoubtedly is: and it is so called three or four times over in the chapter whence the text is taken. It is a place of rest from trouble; because all who go thither are beyond the reach of every kind of sorrow. It is a place of rest from fear; because no enemy can enter there. It is a place of rest from doubts; because God there shews himself to his saints without a cloud, and they see him as he is,

and see their duty to him also, and love it. All this rest assuredly you will have, if you go to heaven. But is this what most people mean, when they call heaven a place of rest? I fear not. I fear the rest they are thinking of is a lazy kind of rest, like the rest in sleep. Now this sort of rest, which for distinction's sake we will call repose, this rest, or repose, I need hardly tell you, who are labouring folk, is one of the sweetest and best things in the world after toil. How delightfully refreshing a good night's sleep is after a day's work, even I know: and you, who work so much oftener, and so much harder, must know it far better. Sleep of this kind is one of God's best gifts to us; and we ought to be very thankful to him for it. But then there must be the toil first, to sweeten the sleep: else it will neither be sound nor healthy. So is it with repose of every kind. It requires some toil beforehand, some labour or exertion of body or mind to sweeten it. In its common usage repose means doing nothing. Would doing nothing for a lifetime be enjoyable? Would it be true happiness? Rather would it render life a burthen almost too heavy for you to bear. If you doubt this, make the trial for a single day. Try sitting down, or lying down, for a whole day. Mind, you must not read: that would be doing something. You must not think: that would be

doing something. You must not even talk: for that again would be doing something, though not perhaps to very good purpose. No, you are to sit still, or lie still, for a whole day, and do nothing. Would a man enjoy such repose as this? would not he be heartily sick of it long before the day was over, and wish himself at almost any kind of work, so he might move his limbs again, and speak and think as usual?

For man is formed for action, and, if kept from action, would be miserable. Yet there are many, I fear, who, if they think of heaven at all, think of it chiefly as a place of rest and repose. Ask them what they look for in heaven; and they will tell you that they hope to be free from labour there. Now excessive labour of body, we may indeed trust, there will be none there. The poor will be freed from that, just as the rich and thoughtful will be freed from, what is far more wearing, excessive labour of mind. But though we shall none of us be overtasked and overworked in heaven, we shall have employment in abundance. Heaven is not a place to do nothing in. Hell may be such a place; and if it is, this is one of its chief curses and torments. To give you a full idea of the horrors of such a state of everlasting listlessness and torpour, would be impossible. But I can perhaps give you some slight notion of it. You know what it is to be

bedridden. Few states of life are more piteous. But if it be so sad a thing to be bedridden in body, it must be a thousandfold more woful to be bedridden in soul, to have no power of exerting our minds, nothing to employ our thoughts on, to be condemned, like the toads that are sometimes found in the middle of a rock, to live a living death of palsied inactivity. Must not this be grievous? Yet this would be a state of rest, if rest meant doing nothing. The rest prepared for us in heaven must needs be very different. It must be rest in which a great deal may be done. Even the Lord's prayer teaches us this. In that prayer, you know, we pray that God's will may be done in earth, as it is in heaven. God's will then *is done* in heaven. It is done there now by the angels: for so we read in the 103rd Psalm: "O praise the Lord, ye angels of his, that do his commandments, and hearken to the voice of his word." And hereafter it will be done by the glorified spirits, who are happy enough to gain admission into that blissful abode. They too will doubtless become ministering spirits, whose business it will be to do God's pleasure.

But if our life in heaven is to be a life of activity and employment in God's service, how can it be called rest? Because it is free from trouble, free from sorrow, free from danger, free from fear,

from evil and harassing doubt. Added to which it will be a rest from everything really toilsome. There are two things that make work painful: when there is too much of it; or when the work itself is grating and disagreeable. To work beyond our strength is painful: to work against our will is painful. But when the work is not beyond our strength, and when it is something we like to do, it is so far from being irksome, that we rather count it a pleasure. So will it be in heaven. We shall never be worked beyond our strength: because, whatever be the task which God sets us, he will give us strength to do it. Nor shall we ever have to work against our will: because God's will and ours will then be one; and the tasks he sets us will be our chief delight. This, my brethren, is the true secret of the rest which Jesus has prepared for us. There will be no rending and splitting of the feelings, no inward strife. One half of the man will not be fighting against the other half, as is too often the case now. We shall not have conscience calling us to the right, while passion, or gain, or temper, or whim, is dragging us to the left. All these wearisome struggles and conflicts, which so tear a man to pieces, will then be over. We shall serve God with our *whole* heart. Think what strength, what comfort, what happiness there will be in that.

Our Saviour made this his principle during his stay on earth, and found great refreshment from it even here; as we know from a beautiful story in St John of what took place at Jacob's well. In going through Samaria, Jesus sat down there during the heat of the day, while his disciples went to buy some food. Meantime a woman came to the well to draw water; and Jesus began to talk with her, and to teach her how to serve God. This lasted till the disciples came back with the food they had been buying, and prayed him to eat of it. But instead of doing so he answered, "I have meat that ye know not of;" as if he had said, I have had my food already. His disciples said one to another, "Hath any man brought him anything to eat?" Jesus saith to them, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." I have found my refreshment in teaching this poor sinner. This is to me a greater delight, a greater refreshment, a greater rest, than any other. Now if this was the case, even while Jesus was encumbered with a body liable to hunger and thirst and weariness, shall it not much rather be the case with us, when we have put on immortality, and have put off the infirmities of the flesh, and are exalted to that happy state where men shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; but "the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall

feed them, and lead them to the living fountains" of holiness and truth and love? (Rev. vii. 17.)

These, my brethren, are the fountains which our souls will drink of. We shall drink in love from the presence of our Saviour: we shall drink in truth from the contemplation of the Godhead: we shall drink in holiness from the influence of that Spirit whose name is holy, whose office is to hallow. In so doing we shall find the same refreshment which our blessed Saviour found at Jacob's well in talking with the woman of Samaria. As we read of Elijah, that, in the strength of the meat which the angel brought him, while he slept under the juniper tree, he went forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God; so we, by the strength of those heavenly principles, whereby the souls of the blessed will be supported, shall be enabled to do God's will with the readiness and zeal of an unwearable and ever-growing affection; and this, not for forty days and nights alone, but for endless ages, even for ever and ever. Yes, for ever and ever will the blessed be journeying toward God, ever coming nearer and nearer to him, in his more attainable perfections. This shall be their rest for ever, to do the will of their Father from their heart, to flourish in the courts of their King and their God.

This rest, I beseech you to remember, is

placed within the reach of every one of us. For I am preaching to a christian congregation. Every soul here has entered through baptism into a covenant with Christ, our anointed King and Priest, which covenant he will certainly keep, if we keep it too. Now what were the terms of that covenant on Christ's part? That he would receive us, and release us from our sins, and sanctify us with the Holy Ghost, and give us the kingdom of heaven and everlasting life, which he has purchased for us with his blood. Here we have our Saviour's covenant, promising heaven and everlasting life to every Christian. The promise is universal, to every one of us. Every one of us therefore may make this promise bear on himself. Every Christian, through the merits and mercies of Jesus Christ, may attain to a blessed rest in heaven. We *may* attain to it: but *shall* we attain to it? That depends on our keeping our part of the covenant; which is, that we shall renounce the devil and all his works, and constantly believe God's word, and obey his holy commandments. If we do not keep our part of the covenant, neither will Christ keep his. Another covenant will then come into force, the covenant of wrath. For there are two covenants,—the covenant of mercy, to all the penitent and obedient,—and the covenant of wrath, tribulation, and anguish, to every soul of

man that doeth evil: and God is equally bound to the one covenant as to the other. He who cannot lie, has equally declared that he will accept the penitent and obedient, and that he will by no means clear the guilty (Numb. xiv. 18). So that the two covenants stand on the same footing,—the unchangeable will and most certain word of God. Every soul too must needs come under one or other of them. He who does not keep within the covenant of mercy and grace, falls under the covenant of wrath. This is the reason why the apostle, in the chapter from which the text is taken, so strongly urges us to labour to enter into that blessed rest; because, unless we do so, we shall miss it. His fear is, that men, after being admitted into the covenant with Christ, will trust blindly to their christian privileges, saying, "The temple of the Lord! the temple of the Lord! the temple of the Lord are we!" and so fall under God's wrath, and forfeit their heavenly inheritance; just as the Israelites by their rebellions in the wilderness offended God, and lost their earthly inheritance, the land of Canaan. Heaven is not more promised to us, than the land of Canaan was to them. It is called over and over again the *promised land:* yet they lost it by not abiding in their covenant with God. In like manner shall we lose our heavenly resting-

place, if we do not keep our covenant with Christ.

But how are we to labour, what course are we to follow, in order to reach that blessed rest? We are to labour in well-doing; we are to search the Scriptures: we are to give ourselves to regular and hearty prayer. By reading the Scriptures and other godly books, we learn the will of God. Then comes the labour of well-doing, the endeavour to practise what we have learnt. When that endeavour fails, as fail it must,—for no man ever did keep, or ever can keep the law of God in all its breadth and purity,—that very failure will be of service, by humbling us, and convincing us of our weakness. It will be a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It will make us feel our need of the redemption he has wrought for us. It will put salvation in our eyes on its right grounds, as entirely a matter of grace and favour on his part, not of right and merit on ours. Thus shall we become humbly thankful for the very least of his earthly blessings, yet eager after glory and immortality, and hopeful through his goodness of attaining to it. We shall seek to be born again, born to a spiritual life, as distinguished from that which is merely intellectual and human. We shall learn where those wings are to be sought, which we want to carry us up

to heaven. We shall be led to pray with double earnestness for the help of the Holy Spirit; because we shall feel that without his help all we can do is vain. That help is promised in the Gospel to all who persevere in asking for it: and the knowledge of this, the certainty of obtaining it if we ask long enough, the consciousness that without it we cannot obey God, or become holy, or attain to the glory and happiness of serving him in the rest of heaven,—these thoughts and feelings are just the things to urge a man to pray humbly and heartily and without ceasing. And if we do so pray, we shall obtain.

There are two other points belonging to our subject on which I would say a few words. One is the apostle's account of the rest in question. He calls it a rest from our own works. And truly our own works are our greatest grief and burthen. We double the load on our backs. The service of God, if we embraced it in youth, would be comparatively easy and delightful. But we go about picking up evil habits of every kind, and then plead those very habits in excuse of our not obeying God. We give ourselves to sensuality in youth, to ambition and to covetousness in manhood, and thus become slaves, and do a slave's service. A rest from such drudgery as this, a rest from the works of the devil and the world, and

from the weary burthen of our own selfishness,—this is the greatest liberty, the greatest gift, which God can bestow on us here below. Yet even they who have attained to this glorious liberty, have still their own works to encumber them. Though no longer slaves, they are soldiers. They have a path to keep, a warfare to maintain. They have to tame their own will into conformity with the will of God. But when that will is at last slain in them, as it will be by the stroke of death, when they are delivered from their own works, what will their rest be then? Their work then will be God's work; and it will be a strength and a joy to them to do it.

The next point is the name which the apostle gives to this rest. He calls it a Sabbath, in the verse but one before the text: "there remaineth a rest, or, (as the margin has it, coming closer to the original,) the keeping of a Sabbath, to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." This then may serve us as a kind of picture of what the rest of heaven will be. The rest of heaven, when compared with the labour of earth, will be as the rest of Sunday, compared with the labour of a weekday. Sunday, we all know, is a day of rest. But is it a day for doing nothing? Many people, very many, make it so;

and to them Sunday is the dullest and most tiresome day in all the week: just as the ungodly, being unable to understand the happiness which such as love God find in serving him, will sometimes say in their mad folly that heaven must be a very dull and stupid place. To the Christian however, to him who loves God, Sunday, instead of being an idle day, is the day of the greatest activity in the whole week. For of a weekday a great part must needs be spent in the work of this world, in the work of the body: and the body soon grows weary and jaded, and drags lazily and heavily along; and then it hangs like a weight upon the soul, so that the soul cannot lift itself up, or hardly so much as stir. But on a Sunday the body ceases from its work: it is no longer such a clog to the soul. Sunday is the day for soul-work, as weekdays are the days for body-work. On a Sunday the soul has the whole day to itself: and it ought to spend the chief part of it in prayer, in communing with God, and in the study of his holy word, in striving to learn more of him and his will, and in strengthening itself against the coming week by drinking in plenteously of the waters of life. Nay, even of body-work, we know, there is one sort allowable on a Sunday. Our blessed Lord never scrupled to heal on the Sabbath. In like manner every work

which is a work of love, every work which is a heavenly work, every work which is done in the service of the kingdom of God, belongs especially to a Sunday. Thus, we have two sorts of Sunday works, prayer and other works of devotion, and works of love. Both of them form the right employment of the earthly Sabbath: and both of them will form the never-ceasing employment of the Sabbath which the saints will enjoy in heaven.

I have told you how you are to labour to enter into God's rest. By reading the Scriptures, by welldoing, and by prayer. Now let me ask you in conclusion, what time can be more proper for taking in hand these holy labours, what season can be fitter for entering on a course of earnest and humble prayer to the Spirit for his help, than this, when we are commemorating the descent of that blessed Spirit on the day of Pentecost? That descent was visible; because the Church of Christ in its infant state needed the support of signs and wonders. The Holy Ghost, descending on the apostles with the sound as of a rushing mighty wind, enabled the first preachers of Christianity to speak with tongues, and to work a great number of miracles. These extraordinary gifts were given for a season, to answer a particular purpose. They were the testimony which

the Holy Ghost bore to the truth of what the apostles taught: and when the need for that testimony ceased, the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit appear gradually to have ceased also. But though the Holy Ghost no longer descends in a visible shape, nor endows us with the power of speaking with strange tongues, or of working miracles, his ordinary and better gifts are still bestowed upon all God's faithful people. I say his better gifts: because they are gifts that make us better. No soul was ever the better for having the power of working miracles. But every one is made better and happier, who receives the gifts of love, joy, peace, faith, meekness, and the other fruits of the Spirit.

Those fruits, those gifts, the Holy Ghost still brings to all who pray to him to come to them. But remember, he will not come to an unclean house. He will not come to a heart polluted by intemperance or debauchery. At the present season of festivity this warning is especially necessary. The Church of Christ has set apart three seasons in every year, Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, for holy rejoicing, on account of the birth, and of the resurrection of our Lord and Master, and of the coming of the Holy Ghost. But the devil has taken advantage of these appointed seasons, and perverted them to his own

ends. He has daringly set up his standard against God's, on each of these great feast-days; it is sad to think with what success. I verily believe there is more drunkenness, more rioting, more wickedness of all kinds going on at these three holy seasons of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, than in any other three weeks of the year. My brethren, is this right? Is it better than a mere mockery of God? Is not it a downright insult to him, to come hither and pray to him with your lips for pardon, and to promise amendment, and ask his aid, and perhaps even invite him into your hearts, and then to go to-morrow, or the day after, nay perhaps to go this very evening fresh from God's house, to some place of merry-making, as it is called, there to do everything which you have just renounced, everything which God has forbidden? What can any one expect from such profane mockery, but that God should leave the man to himself, and suffer him to fall from bad to worse, until at last he sinks into that dreadful pit, where they have no rest day or night, but the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever? Would we escape that horrible pit? Let us shun all the paths which lead thither. Let us open our ears to the merciful calls to repentance, which God is ever sending us by his word and ministers. Keeping

in mind how high a prize, how bright a crown is set before us, let us labour to attain to them, and so to enter into the rest which Christ has prepared for his faithful people.

SERMON XXI.

HOLY BRANCHES;

OR,

WHY WAS THE TRINITY REVEALED?

ROMANS xi. 16.

If the root be holy, so are the branches.

THE purpose of our Saviour's coming was to redeem and deliver us from all iniquity, and to purify us as a peculiar people, zealous of good works. This is the great end of his teaching; and this end all the doctrines of his religion further. For instance, the doctrine of the everlasting pains of hell,—why has that been made known to us, except to frighten us from sin? Why again has the doctrine of the unspeakable joys of heaven been made known to us, except to comfort and encourage us in well-doing? In like manner all the other doctrines of our faith are designed either to warn us against going astray, or to quicken our

steps along the right path, or at least in some way or other to keep us firm and stedfast in our duty. So that our religion may not unfitly be compared to a great tree; of which the doctrines are the roots, and uprightness is the trunk, and godly deeds and all the ministries of love are the outspreading branches, and piety is the heavenward pointing head. As a tree grows up from its roots, and they nourish and support it; so do the duties of religion grow out of its doctrines, and rest on its doctrines, and draw their life from them. If the trunk of a tree be separated from the roots, it falls: nor will a man's morality be able to stand, unless it be rooted and anchored deep in the great truths of religion. Any hour of trial, a gust of passion, a sharp blast of temptation from an exposed quarter, would lay such unsupported virtue low. It would fall, like the house built on the sand; and great and sad would its fall be. But as a tree is nothing without its roots, so the roots on the other hand are nothing without the tree. It is for the sake of supporting the branching, wide-spreading tree, that there are any roots at all. No one ever saw a root growing by itself and for itself. A root without a tree would be the same sort of thing among God's works, as a foundation without a house among man's works. Nor is this

less true of the spiritual roots of faith. God, who does nothing in vain, has not revealed any doctrine to us for the mere sake of feeding our curiosity, or of making us stare and wonder. Doctrines from which nothing springs would be as much out of place in the book of God's word, as roots from which nothing grows would be in the book of nature. Such roots are not living, but dead. Whenever therefore you come to any doctrine in the Bible, bear in mind that the Scriptures were not written to make us wise merely, in that which the world deems wisdom,—but wise unto salvation. Instead of stumbling over the doctrine, as a blind or heedless man might stumble over a root that lay in his path, and stood a little way out of the ground,—instead, I say, of stumbling over it, and being offended at it, say to yourselves, "Here is another root of godly living, a root which, if I can only plant it in my heart, is sure to bring forth a goodly tree of some christian grace or other."

Thus it is with all the great truths, with all the great doctrines of our faith: nor is it otherwise with the greatest and most mysterious of all its doctrines, with the doctrine which embraces all the others, the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity. But what is the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity? Some of you may perhaps be glad to

hear a short and simple explanation of it. And much does it behove you to understand what the Scriptures have revealed to us on this matter: seeing that it is the very doctrine into which you were all baptized, when you were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. On this great and wonderful mystery it becomes the ministers of Christ to speak, humbly indeed, but plainly and boldly, so far as Scripture bears them out,—no further. Where the Bible stops, we must stop too. Were you walking over a mountainous country, beset with steep and dangerous precipices, so long as the sun lit up your path, and shewed you a safe footing, you would go on cheerfully and fearlessly. Still safer and more confident would you feel, if an angel were leading you by the hand. But if the sun went down, if a thick mist arose, if the angel let go your hand, if you found yourself in this dangerous country without light and without a guide, would you go on then? Surely the true wisdom would be to stop the moment the light faded away, lest, by walking rashly on, you might stumble or slip into the jaws of death. Thus, when we are talking of the Trinity, so long as we keep within the bounds of Scripture, we may walk safely: for the light of God is upon us, and his angel is leading us by the hand. But when the Bible stops, we must stop

also. Every step beyond the written word is dangerous and rash and foolish.

Still, though it would be most unwise to follow the dancing lights of our own fancies, where the risk of a false step is so great, yet, as long as the light of the Bible is on our path, we may, we ought to go on, under the assurance that God has revealed nothing in his word, except what it behoves us to know. We may not be able to reach the very top: but let us mount as high as we can, keeping in mind that we are not walking by our own light, but by God's light, and therefore walking humbly, as befits those who can do nothing of themselves. For, as an excellent writer has said, "What would it profit us to speak never so wisely of the Trinity, if by speaking proudly we offended the Trinity?" In this humble spirit would I speak, in this spirit would I have you listen to what I shall say, concerning the Holy Trinity.

"The Catholic faith (as you have just heard in the Athanasian Creed) is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity." This is the Catholic faith; that is to say, the universal faith, the faith held by every faithful part and member of Christ's Church. By whatever name the various branches of that Church may be called, —Roman Catholics, Greeks, Lutherans, we of the

Church of England, our brethren of the Church of Scotland,—however they may disagree and differ on other points,—and alas! these differences are so many and so violent, that Christ's coat, which was woven without seam from top to bottom, setting forth the perfect union which ought to subsist among true believers, has been shamefully rent and almost torn to tatters amongst them,—still, these many violent differences notwithstanding, the several churches of Christendom all agree in this, that they worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. Therefore this faith is called catholic, or universal; because it is held by all the churches. For this is the meaning of the word Catholic: the catholic faith is that which is held by all true believers: the catholic Church is that which embraces and is made up of all true believers; and everybody is a member of that Church, who holds all the great doctrines of the christian faith. This is the Holy Catholic Church which we profess in the Creed to believe in. This is the Catholic Church for which we pray in the prayer for all sorts and conditions of men, and in the Litany, where we call it the holy Church universal.

Now the great doctrine of that Church, the doctrine which is held by every branch of that Church,—the doctrine by which whoever holds it becomes a member of that Church, while whoever

rejects it ceases to belong to that Church, and becomes a heretic,—is the doctrine of the Trinity: that is to say, the doctrine that in the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God: and that yet there are not three Gods, but one God. To the carnal understanding this doctrine sounds strange and hard to believe: it is strange and hard to believe, that three should be one, and that one should be three. Why then does the whole body of the Catholic Church hold this doctrine? Because it is plainly set down in Scripture. Because the Scripture tells us on the one hand that God is one, and on the other hand that the Father is God, that our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, the Word that was with God from the beginning, is God, and that the Holy Ghost is God. Because moreover we are convinced that it is not in man, by seeking, to find out God, and that we cannot know anything of God, except what God himself is graciously pleased to make known to us.

This then is the Catholic faith, that we acknowledge the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to be each of them God, and yet that they are not three Gods, but one God. How these three persons are so united as to make up only one God, we are nowhere told in Scripture: therefore

on this, as with regard to so many lesser matters, we must be content to remain ignorant. Does this seem a great hardship to the pride of the would-be wise? Let them come forward then, and prove their right to be admitted into the innermost mysteries of heaven, by shewing that they have fully mastered all the lesser mysteries of earth. Let them tell me why the needle of the compass always turns toward the north. Perhaps they will say, because it is its nature to do so. But that is no answer. My question is, why does the needle so turn? What secret and invisible hand twists it round, and teaches it to point always the same way? Or, if this be too puzzling a question, perhaps these wise men, who think it so great a hardship that they are not permitted to understand God, may tell us a little about themselves. They can perhaps teach us how it comes to pass that the blood keeps on flowing unceasingly through our veins without our being aware of it, except when we are in a high fever. We grow tired with labour, or with exercise; we tire even with doing nothing: we need sleep at certain seasons to refresh us for the taskwork of the morrow: but the blood never wearies. On it flows, from the hour of our birth, day and night, summer and winter; year after year it keeps on its silent round, never felt when we are in health, yet never stopping, and

never sleeping, until it stops once for all, and sleeps the sleep of death. How, I ask, can these things be? What, again no answer! Tell me then at least, how it is that I dream; or, if you cannot,—and no one can,—let those who know nothing about the how and the why in so many of the commonest earthly matters, not be so very much surprised that they cannot understand the essence of that invisible, that eternal, that infinite Spirit, whom we call God.

But though the Scripture has only told us that these things are, without teaching us how they are, yet for the sake of shewing that the mystery of the Trinity is not so utterly at variance with what we find in earthly things, as unbelievers would fain persuade us,—for the sake of proving how possible it is, even according to our limited notions, for that which is three in one sense, to be one in another sense,—learned and pious men have busied themselves in seeking out likenesses for the Trinity among the things of this world. It is most true indeed, and should be borne in mind, that these likenesses must be very imperfect, and that they cannot give us anything approaching to a full and just idea of the glorious Trinity. For so the prophet teaches us, when he exclaims, "To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare to him? Have ye not

known? have ye not heard? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in" (Isaiah xl. 18, 22). To whom then, or to what created thing can we liken God, and not fall immeasurably below the glory of his infinite perfections? Still, although no likeness to which we can liken God, can be of any avail toward shewing him to us as he is, yet since so many find a stumbling-block in the mystery of the Trinity, and so many cast it as a stumbling-block in their brother's path, there can be no harm, and there may be some good, in comparisons, which shew that it is not altogether unlike what we find in the natural world. Moreover such comparisons may help you in attaching some sort of notion, though a very dim and imperfect one, to the words of your Creed, which declare that God is one, and yet that there are three persons in the Godhead. They may keep these words from lying dead on your minds, or rather on your tongues.

One of the comparisons or likenesses I am speaking of is taken from the most glorious object which our eyes see, the sun. That ball of light and heat, which we call most properly the Sun, may be compared to the Father, from whom both the Word

and the Spirit come. From this sun the light issues, and is as it were a part of it, and yet comes down to our earth and gives light to us. This we may compare to the Word, who came forth from the Father, and came down on earth, and was made man, and who, as St John tells us, is "the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." But beside this there is the heat, which is a different thing from the light: for we all know, there may be heat without light; and so may there be light,—moonlight for example, and starlight,—without any perceivable heat. Yet the two are blended and united in the sun; so that the same rays, which bring us light to enlighten us, bring us heat also to warm us, and to ripen the fruits and herbs of all kinds which the earth bears. This heat of the sun may not unfitly be compared to the Holy Spirit, that Lord and Giver of life, as the Creed calls him: for heat is the great fosterer of life: as we see for example in an egg. As that is hatched by the warmth of the parent bird, sitting on it lovingly, and brooding over it, until it is quickened into life; just so does the Holy Spirit of God brood with more than dove-like patience over the heart of the believer, giving it life and warmth: and though he be driven away again and again by our backslidings, he still hovers round our hearts, desiring to

return to them, and to dwell in them, and cherish them for ever. Moreover, if any seed of the Word has begun to spring up in any heart, the Spirit descends like a sunbeam upon it, and ripens the ear, and brings the fruit to perfection. Thus have we first the sun in the sky, secondly, the light, which issues from the sun, and thirdly, the heat, which accompanies the light,—three separate and distinguishable things: yet distinct as they are, what can be more united than the sun and its rays, or than the light and heat which those rays shed abroad?

The comparison which I have just set before you, is taken from the most glorious of the heavenly bodies known to us, the Sun. Another is sometimes taken from the purest of earthly bodies, water. Here too we have first the fountain, high up among the rocks, far out of man's reach, answering to the Father; secondly, the stream, which issues from the fountain, and flows down into the valley for the use of man, and which may be likened to Jesus Christ, the Son; thirdly, the mist, which rises from the water, and falls in rain or dew upon the thirsty ground: this, I need hardly say, answers to the Holy Spirit, who in the days of the apostles came down visibly, like the rain, with a sound as of a rushing mighty wind, but who now descends gently and silently, like the dew in the

silence of night, on the heart of the humble believer, to refresh it, to soften it, and to make it fruitful.

Do not mistake me, my brethren. I do not mean that these comparisons will enable us to understand the mystery of the Trinity; no more than a farthing rushlight will enable us to understand the sun. But supposing a man, who had never seen the sun, were to say, it is impossible for the light to abide in the sun, and yet to be shed abroad over the earth, a farthing rushlight would suffice to shew him that the light, though it fills the room, may yet abide with the candle. In like manner the comparison I have been setting before you may suffice to convince you that the difficulty, by which so many have been offended, in the mystery of the Trinity, is not so irreconcilable with what we find in God's created works, as we are apt to fancy it. And this is all that we need. What God is in himself,—how the eternal Word is the only begotten of the Father,—how the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son,—how the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost abide for ever in indissoluble union and unity,—these are questions of no importance to the practical government of our lives. Therefore God has not thought fit to reveal them to us more clearly. That which it concerns us to know, that which is to act upon

our hearts and souls, and through them on our conduct, has been declared to us. The holy root lies hid under ground: the holy branches spread abroad before our sight, and offer us a safe shelter from all the evils of this world. Knowledge, a wise man has said, is power: but it is power only when we use it. Knowledge not applied, or misapplied, profits nothing. What good would knowing all the herbs and simples in the world do a sick man, if he did not use them to cure his sickness? Neither would it profit us to know the most secret mysteries of the divine nature, unless that knowledge helped us on in the paths of holiness and godliness.

But what, you may ask, are the practical uses and purposes, for which the doctrine of the Trinity was revealed to us? What good can it do us to know that the Son is God, and that the Holy Ghost is God, as well as the Father, and yet that there are not three Gods, but one God? What are the holy branches which spring from this most holy root?

Now, if the purpose and end of Christianity be, as it doubtless is, to bring us near to God in heart and life, it is easy to see, how much the revealing the doctrine of the Trinity to us is fitted to further that end. I say, the revealing it to us: because there might have been a Trinity;

the Son of God might have died to save us; the Holy Ghost might come and sanctify us; and yet we might know nothing of the matter. Even this would doubtless have been a great mercy, and a great blessing. But the having that mercy revealed to us so plainly,—the knowledge that these things are so,—the being made acquainted with the great works which have been done, and are doing, by the Son of God and the Spirit of God for our sakes,—this multiplies our debt, and makes the blessing and the mercy much greater.

For consider what would be the state of a sinner, on waking from his sin, if he did not know himself to be pardoned. What dread! what horror! what despair! what distracting thoughts of God's righteous indignation! What an ever-present vision of hell yawning to devour him! What a doleful voice ever ringing in his ears, Judgement! Judgement! Who could remain long in such a state? What mind could go on dwelling on such terrible and dismal thoughts, and not be driven mad? Yet this would be the state, the natural and reasonable state, of a sinner awaking from the sleep of sin, if he did not know of the propitiatory sacrifice which Christ has offered up for sin. But now that the good news of pardon and acceptance with God through the blood of Christ has been proclaimed to all who repent, the light of hope is

let into the prison-house of sin: so that they who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, fast bound in misery and iron,—they who naturally could have nothing to look for but judgement and fiery indignation, for the misdeeds they have been wilfully guilty of,—for their drunkenness, for their lust, for their foul and evil-speaking, for the pains they have taken to learn mischief, for the opportunities of instruction and improvement which they have thrown away,—even these, on awaking from their slumber, and coming to a right mind, have only to lift up their eyes to heaven, to see the beams of mercy and forgiveness shining and ready to descend. They have only to take up their Bibles; and they will read there—what? That sin is a light matter? Far from it. That it does not signify whether a man goes on sinning or not? By no means. That God is easy, and will let sinners go unpunished? Quite the contrary. They will find that sin is hateful to God, that punishment must follow it, that God "will by no means clear the guilty," but, according to their deeds, will repay "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. ii. 9). Yet in the midst of all these terrible passages, which so awfully represent God's justice, they will find the freest and fullest and most merciful promises of pardon for Christ's sake, to every one without

exception who repents and truly turns to God in time. They will read that "the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7); that God gave his only begotten Son in order that all true believers in him should have everlasting life (John iii. 16); and many other passages to the same effect. These will be sufficient, not to banish the sinner's shame and sorrow for his past life,—God forbid that they should! but they will make that shame and sorrow bearable. They will prevent his soul from sinking to the earth under an insupportable fear of God's wrath. They will save him from that recklessness and despair, which harden the heart, and make it devilish. Instead of looking on himself as an outcast doomed to eternal torment, he will get to feel that he is pardonable, yea, and already pardoned, if he will only return home to God. He will learn that, during all his wanderings, he has been followed with a watchful eye by his merciful and heavenly Father: and then the thought of having wilfully offended such a father, of having run away from him to go and eat the husks of sin,—that thought, coming with a prospect of forgiveness, will soften his stubborn heart, and will make him sorrow with the godly sorrow which worketh repentance not to be repented of. Such are some of the blessed effects likely to be produced in the sinner's

mind, by knowing that Christ came down from heaven to suffer death for sinners. Here then you see the benefit of knowing at least so much about the Trinity, as to be aware of all that the second person of it, the eternal and only begotten Son of God, has been pleased to do and suffer for our redemption.

The good of knowing what is done for us by the third person of the Trinity is also very great and plain. It is a great benefit for us to have been taught that the Holy Ghost is ever ready to help us in our endeavours after holiness. I have set before you the case of a sinner, whose eyes have been opened to see the danger and the wickedness of offending God, and who is anxious to lead a better life. Let us follow this penitent a few steps on his road, and see what he will do next. Doubtless he will begin his reformation by studying the law of God: for to keep it, he must know it. The first steps will perhaps be easy enough. Not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness, crimes like these he may never have had any mind to: at any rate now he would rather die than be guilty of anything so wicked. But on reading a little further, he meets with other commandments as difficult as the first were easy, commandments far surpassing the utmost reach of human virtue, such as "be

ye holy as God is holy," and "perfect as God is perfect;" commandments the most contradictory to flesh and blood, such as, that we must love them that hate us, that we must deny ourselves, that we must take up our cross and follow Jesus; commandments reaching to the very smallest actions, and even thoughts, such as, that we must cleanse and purify our hearts, that we must bridle our very tongues. Now who is sufficient for such things? Who can hope, try he never so much, to become perfect like God? The more a man thinks what God is, and what great goodness he requires from us, the more he learns of the divine law, how exceeding broad and high and deep it is, the further he sees into the spiritual nature of the service which we owe him,—the more he must needs feel his utter inability to serve and obey God as he ought to do. Here then a new despair threatens to overwhelm the penitent, a despair of being able to pay God a sufficient and acceptable service. He sees, and is forced to confess, to use St Paul's words, "that the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." But what does this profit him? when the holiness of the commandment only shews him his own crookedness, but gives him no means of becoming upright. What does it avail him that he delights in the law of God, and feels its excellence and purity? so long as he

sees another law in his members bringing him into captivity to sin, or at least crippling him from attaining to the purity he admires and longs for. Truly it avails and profits him just as much, and no more, than it profited the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda to be desirous of being made whole, and to lie on the edge of the healing waters, which he had not strength to step into. But thanks be to God! a remedy has been provided for this our natural weakness by the gracious kindness of the Holy Ghost; just as a remedy has been provided for our natural sinfulness by the bloodshedding of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God takes the sinner out of the hands of the blessed Jesus: he nurses him; he cherishes him; he feeds him; he supports and strengthens him; and finally he takes up his abode within him, and purifies him, and gradually changes his whole nature, filling him with love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Surely the knowledge that the Spirit does all this, is an inestimable benefit to the young Christian. It gives him courage: it incites him to persevere and struggle on: it sets before him a certainty of conquering, if he be not wanting to himself. Instead of crying out, as otherwise he might have done, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the

body of this death?" he now exclaims, with humble confidence, "I can do all things, through Christ that strengtheneth me: in spite of tribulation and temptation, through Christ I shall be more than conqueror."

Nor is it merely to the sinner, or to the penitent, that the knowledge of the Son and of the Spirit of God is a root yielding blessed fruit. To the true followers of Jesus Christ, to those who have already made advances in holiness, to those who have tasted and learnt how gracious the Lord is,—to such persons the knowledge of these great truths is still more precious than to any others. Think of knowing that you have a Friend, a Saviour, a prevailing Advocate in heaven. Think of knowing that you have the Spirit of all peace and joy and purity dwelling in you. Think of knowing that, come what will, you have an almighty Shepherd, who once died to save you, and who now ever liveth to protect you. "Who will harm you," says St Peter, "if ye be followers of that which is good?" Let me wax bolder, and ask, what can harm you? What can harm you, if ye be followers of Christ? Can Satan, whom he has trampled on? can the world, which he made, and will destroy? can sin, which he expiated on the cross? can death, whose chains he burst at his resurrection? Fears then there

can be none, except from human weakness, to the faithful followers of Jesus. Nor can there be doubts, or lasting sorrow. What doubts can there be to that man, who hath God's word pledged for his salvation, and who has the promise of the Holy Spirit to teach him every necessary truth? As to sorrow, are we not expressly told that all things work together for good to them that love God? What room then to such blessed persons can there be for any lasting sorrow? Even that most incurable of earthly griefs, the grief for the loss of those who are gone before us,—even of that St Paul speaks in these words: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. iv. 13—18.)

The sum of the whole is this: though the nature of God must needs be mysterious to our understandings, there is no mystery in the benefits we receive from him, nor any darkness in the duty we owe him. Without comprehending how the three persons of the Godhead are united in one eternal God, we may glorify each for his excellent greatness and goodness to man. We may glorify

the Father, the original fountain of all things, who sent his only Son to work out our salvation. We may glorify the Son, who undertook and has accomplished that salvation. We may glorify the Holy Ghost, who is graciously present with the faithful in Christ to write his words in their hearts, to comfort and succour them, and to lead them in the steps of their Redeemer to the gates of heaven which he has opened. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, were not revealed to us that we might be more knowing than the heathens. We were told of the Father, that we might obey the Father: we were told of the Son, that we might be delivered from our sins by the Son: we were told of the Holy Ghost, that we might welcome him into our hearts, and throw them open to receive him. What will it avail us to have heard of the Father, if we choose to be cast out for ever from his presence? what, to have heard of the Son, if we reject the atonement of his blood? what, to have been brought up in the knowledge of the Holy Ghost, if we despise his warnings, drive him from our hearts by our impurities, and remain, like Gideon's fleece, dry in the midst of so much moisture, unregenerate and unsanctified amid the largest offers of the freest and most overflowing sanctification? Do not deceive yourselves so fatally, my brethren: do not repeat the error of

the Jews. Do not fancy that knowing is doing, that right notions make a saving faith. True faith and true love, the trust in God and the love of God,—a trust shewn by resignation to his will, a love proved by keeping his commandments,—these are the only things to rely on. Cling to them, and they will bear you through the world to heaven, where all mysteries will be cleared up, and all difficulties will be done away: for we shall be let into the presence of God, and shall see him as he is. And what is better, if possible, even than seeing and knowing God, we shall be ever growing more and more like him.

SERMON XXII.

THE FOOLISH MOCKERS.

PROVERBS xiv. 9.

Fools make a mock at sin.

"BLESSED is the man, (says David at the beginning of the Psalms,) who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, and hath not sat in the seat of the scornful." These words, it is plain, are meant to describe the course and progress of a wicked life, going on from bad to worse, until it arrives in the end at the most hardened and reckless impiety. Therefore *to sit in the seat of the scornful* must be a very dreadful state; inasmuch as it amounts, in the language of the Psalmist, to fixing oneself resolutely and boastfully in evil. In like manner the prophet Jeremiah, when speaking of certain persons from whose company and conversation he kept aloof, makes use of nearly the same expression: "*I*

sat not in the assembly of the mockers" (xv. 17). Now who are these scornful persons, these mockers, whom holy men of old were so careful to shun? They are the very persons of whom Solomon is speaking in the text, the fools, as he calls them, who make a mock at sin. If you bear in mind what sin is,—that it is an open rebellion against the God of heaven, that it is a defiance of Him who is Almighty,—you may know what you ought to think of persons who are daring enough to make a mock at it. To make a mock is to speak lightly and slightingly of a thing, or, as we should say in common English, to make a jest of it. But what must be the state of a man's mind, when he can make a jest of offending God? Can he be in his senses? He has lost the most precious of all senses, the sense of right and wrong. Therefore the Bible, which takes no account of any wisdom, except that which goes along with righteousness in this world, and leads to blessedness in the next, calls all such persons fools: "Fools make a mock at sin." Angels, we have reason to believe, mourn for sin, and weep, if they can weep, over the state of sinners. How foolish then must that man be, who can laugh at what angels weep at! A laugher at a funeral would be a wise man to such a person.

This is so plain a truth, that none of you, I

should think, can doubt it. No man, at least no man who ever set foot in a church, can doubt the foolishness and madness of opposing and contradicting God, by either calling or thinking a thing light and harmless and laughable, which he has declared to be a sin, and therefore hateful in his holy all-seeing eyes. But perhaps you may be disposed to ask, "What is the use then of preaching on such a subject? why take the pains of proving what nobody doubts? why warn people against the folly of a sin that nobody is ever guilty of?" My brethren, did I really believe that nobody, or that very few persons were ever guilty of making a mock at sin, assuredly I should not preach against it. But is this quite certain? Is it quite certain that nobody here present has ever made a mock at sin? Alas, if we consider the various ways in which this may be done, I am afraid that, arrant as this folly is, it will turn out to be much commoner than we fancy. I am afraid that, if we were to question our consciences strictly, few of us would have the satisfaction of finding that they have been always firmly bent, like the prophet, not to sit in the assembly of the mockers.

The various ways in which men make a mock at sin, may be summed up under two heads: by their words, and by their actions. We shew our scorn and contempt of a thing in our words, when

we speak carelessly of it, or laugh at it, or turn it into ridicule. We shew it in our actions, when we live in such a manner as proves that we have no value or regard for it. Words may be uttered thoughtlessly and hastily: but let a person manifest his feelings and sentiments in action, above all in a continued and persevering line of action; let him express his opinions and declare his thoughts by his deeds; and he must indeed be speaking from the abundance of the heart. If a servant, a tenant, a subject were to persist in a course of stubborn resistance to the commands of his master, his landlord, or his king, notwithstanding admonition upon admonition, warning upon warning, threat upon threat, could it be said with the least colour of reason that he respected or cared for him,—that he did not treat him with slight? Suppose that, after many repeated acts of disobedience and resistance, the servant or subject were to go to his master or to his king, and to tell him in a long speech, how much he feared him, how entirely he was devoted to him, while he meant in his heart all the while to go on disobeying and resisting him, exactly as he had done before,—would not such conduct be adding a new and grosser insult to all the former ones? Would it not be a downright mockery? even as it was a mockery in the soldiers, when they crowned Christ, and called him king,

and bowed the knee before him, and then rose up and smote him, and spat on him. This then would be the chief count in my indictment against the main part of those who call themselves Christians,—that they call Jesus Lord, and yet do not the things which he would have them do, insulting him by their disobedience, while they mock him by their lip-service. Even of the first kind of mockery, the mockery of words, few are wholly innocent. Of the last kind of mockery, the mockery of deeds, all have been more or less guilty.

Under the former head come all those grosser offenses against piety, and even against common decency, those scoffs at the word and at the laws of God, the mad babble of the unbeliever, and the obscene ribaldry of the libertine, the mire in which the swine walloweth, and the vomit to which the dog returneth. These barefaced mocks at sin,—let me rather call them mocks at God,—are still however by God's blessing rare amongst us, at least in country parishes: and wherever the lessons of christian education are duly extended to the body of the people, wherever the gospel is duly preached and taught, as Christ ordained it should be, to the poor,—there by God's blessing they shall still continue rare. But there are a number of other offenses, less glaring indeed than those I have just spoken of, which come under the same

head of mocks at sin, and which, I am afraid, are by no means uncommon: though they too are ruinous to all purity of heart, and to all holiness of life. Such are all irreverent applications of scripture phrases, all idle jokes on the mysteries, the ceremonies, and the ordinances of religion, wherein many, especially among the young, are too fond of indulging, thus destroying that reverence for the things of God, which it behoves all to feel. To the same class belong the songs of the drunkard, and all that foolish talking and jesting, which St Paul forbids as not convenient, that is to say, as ill-suited to the character of a Christian, and at variance with that spotlessness of thought and word which our Lord requires from his people.

These things, common though they be, every one knows and feels to be wrong: they are so evidently mocks at sin, nobody has a word to say in excuse of them. Yet when any of us employ any of those little mincing phrases, under which people are so fond of disguising broad and open crimes, when we use any of those gentler names for sins, which the world has cunningly substituted for the plainness of christian language,—are not we ourselves guilty of something like the same offense? Are not we, by a weak compliance with a mischievous and unholy custom, speaking lightly of the sins which God has heavily condemned, when we speak

of them by a light name? This is a matter which people ought to consider more seriously than they do, seeing that names go so far in governing the world. If a lie were always called a lie, and nothing else,—if a theft were always called a theft, and nothing else,—if whoredom and adultery were always called whoredom and adultery, and nothing else,—we should have much fewer liars, fewer thieves, fewer whores and adulteresses, than are now seen walking about, lifting up their heads without shame in the light of the sun. For in that case the sin would be ever set before us in its naked hideousness and horror; and the imagination and the conscience would start from a sight so frightful and revolting. But wrap up the same crime in a soft unmeaning phrase, so that the ear shall not be shocked, nor the conscience scared, call a lie a story or a fib, call the sin of whoredom a slip,—and they who are tempted, too readily fancy there can be no great harm in that of which the world speaks so mildly and indulgently. That the wretches, whether of high or low degree, who wish to further Satan's work on earth, and to decoy new victims to his net,—that they, who are the devil's agents, should employ the devil's craft,—is not surprising. But that the great majority of the world, who have no desire to lead their fellow-creatures into evil, who have no wish to set up the empire of

sin, who would rather see men honest and sincere and chaste and sober, than the contrary,—that we should fall, as almost all have done, into this most mischievous practice of miscalling sins, is indeed a matter of wonder and regret. And yet who can say that he has always spoken of sins, as sins ought to be spoken of? Who can say that he has never used any of those gentle, delicate phrases, by which some of the blackest crimes are frittered down into failings, into errors, into pardonable weaknesses, which it is harsh to censure too severely? It is idle to plead, that the thing remains the same, whatever name you call it by. The softer name does not grate on the ear, does not alarm the soul, and frighten it off the forbidden ground. Call the sin by its true name; and we see and feel that it is a thing hateful to man, and condemned by the law of God. Indeed this is the very reason why people blink the true name: they are loth to speak too much evil of it. Mealy-mouthed in this matter alone, they are loth to speak evil of sin. Who on the other hand can say that he has always spoken of piety and holiness, as piety and holiness ought to be spoken of? For here again the world is wont to speak through the devil's trumpet: here again it has a set of misnomers, another set of mocks. While it speaks of the foulest sins by harmless and familiar

names, turning stains into spots, and spots into specks, it no sooner catches a glimpse of anything that looks like piety, than it sets up a cry against it, ridiculing it, scoffing at it, magnifying every petty act of self-denial into a piece of pharisaical hypocrisy. And here again even those who profess to be Christians, even those who profess to wish that their neighbours should be good Christians, are too apt to follow the example of the world, to jeer where the world jeers, and to rail where the world rails.

This is one, and, all must acknowledge, a very common way, in which the world at present is wont to make a mock at sin. Another and worse form of the same offense, yet, I fear, a very common one also, is when men, in looking at any wicked conduct, suffer themselves to be dazzled by some of its accompaniments, so as to lose sight of its wickedness, and in speaking of it, instead of expressing a righteous indignation at its sinfulness, will talk with admiration of the agreeable qualities with which the criminal has adorned his crime, or of the talents which he has misapplied to it. Who has not heard the reveler and the libertine, if he happens to be lively and companionable, praised as pleasant and goodhumoured? Who has not heard rogues highly spoken of for their dexterity, and almost applauded when sharpwitted? Who

has not witnest how in the opinion of the world cleverness, or courage, covers a multitude of sins? Yet, common as such judgements are, surely they stamp the mark of folly on the brow of all who so judge of sin. No one thinks of praising a poison for being either sweet or strong. No one takes young tigers into his house, and rears them as playmates for his children, because their claws are so sharp, and their gripe so crushing. Yet the same man, who would never think of trusting his child with the sweet or strong poison, who could not sleep in his bed, if he knew that a beast of prey was prowling about his dwelling, will talk in the presence of his family as if there were no harm in wickedness, provided it be pleasant, or clever, or audacious, that is to say, provided it be great and dangerous and attractive, and all but inexcusable. Now how are we to account for this glaring difference between our judgements with regard to physical and moral evil? How comes it, that, if a thing be deadly to the body, we care not for its sweetness, and dread it in proportion to its power? whereas, if a thing be deadly to the soul, we prize it for its attractiveness, and admire it for its power, although both these qualities render it more deadly. The reason is plain: we have a prudent and wholesome dread of bodily pain and death, and are foolishly careless about what can

only hurt and kill the soul. Sin in our eyes is a small matter, so small, that the very qualities which render it more sinful, strip it in our eyes of its offensiveness, and so conceal that offensiveness, that we are ready to embrace and make friends with it. Thus here we have another way in which men are very apt to make light of sin, and to shew their want of clearsightedness, their want of sound judgement, their want of right feeling, in a word, to shew their foolishness in so doing. This is a matter on which it is needful to speak plainly: because it is truly monstrous that, in a christian country, the thing most frequently left out of account in speaking or judging of any action should be its righteousness or sinfulness. Nor would anything that man can do work more powerfully to the encouragement of goodness, and to the discountenancing of irreligion and immorality, than a strict stern habit of calling everything, be it good or be it evil, by its true and christian name.

Thus we have seen that, even in England, and in our days, there are many ways in which people still make a mock at sin in their words, and that such conduct richly deserves the charge of foolishness given to it in the text. But there is also another way of making a mock at sin, in deed. If all pretense and makebelieve be more or less a

mockery, then assuredly a long continued course of such pretenses, in which the tongue goes on crying *Yes*, while the heart all the time is muttering *No*, must prove a man to be habitually and insolently regardless of the thing or person that he treats with such solemn contempt. Such, we say, would be the case, if a servant, after disobeying his master,—a tenant, after defrauding his landlord,—a subject, after rebelling against his king,—should go and make dutiful promises without any intention of performing them. Such too, if we are God's subjects and servants,—if we are his tenants, holding our life and health and all our enjoyments solely under him, and at his will,—such must also be the case with us Christians, whenever we turn our hearts away from God, and yet draw near to him with a thoughtless or hypocritical lip-service. This question may be brought to a speedy issue. We are assembled here in church, to entreat God's pardon for our sins, to acknowledge that we have failed to do what we ought to have done, and have done what we ought not to have done: for all these faults we have entreated to be forgiven, and have besought God to give us his gracious help, that we may lead better lives in future. Now let every person ask himself this simple question: "Did my heart go along with my lips, and with the voice of the minister, when

these petitions were repeated? Did I really feel the slightest touch of grief at having made so base and worthless a return to my King and Master for all his manifold lovingkindnesses to me? Was I in any degree sorry for having offended God? Have I at this moment any sort of wish to serve him better in future?" If you have not felt any of these things, you must be well aware that your prayers have been only so much froth, and that your whole service this evening has been no better than a grave mockery. Yet it is probably the only service that many of you render God from one week's end to the other. Is it not too true then, my brethren, that of this sinful mockery, this mockery by deeds, we have all of us been more or less guilty? God grant that we may not be so now, or that, if any are so now, they may never be so again!

But some of you will perhaps say, that you mean to repent and turn to God by-and-by, and so what you do now does not much signify. Unholy and godless as your lives may be now, Christ's merits are sufficient to wash away all sin; and you mean to take advantage of them, when you have given your passions a run some years longer. And is not this a fresh mock? and perhaps the worst of all. To take advantage of a person usually means to cheat him; and so in fact do

they who talk or think in this way, purpose in their hearts to cheat Christ. Because Christ died to deliver us from our sins, that we may live a life of righteousness, therefore do they continue in their sins, and plead the mercy of God as a ground for cleaving to their iniquity. If men really valued that mercy, as they say they do, if they duly estimated the price it cost to purchase their forgiveness, would they dare so abuse it?

But the guilt of such mockery is too plain: let me rather speak of its folly. It is the folly of playing with death. It is the folly of provoking God to cut us off in the midst of our calculating wickedness. We know, he can read our hearts: we know, he can see our purpose to cheat him. What then! do we think we can outwit God? Above all is such conduct folly, because we are disabling our hearts and souls every day more and more for the work of repentance; without which, we know and believe, we can have no part in the promises of the Gospel. For nothing is more certain, than that, the longer a man persists in sin, the harder it is to leave it off. His heart is deadened; his conscience is blunted; his soul closes itself by little and little against the impulses of the Holy Spirit. Thus at last it becomes as impossible,—the word is a fearful, but a true one,—it becomes as impossible, naturally speaking, for the hardened

sinner to shake off his nature and do well, as for the Ethiopian to change his skin, or for the leopard to change his spots.

Yet be the difficulty of repentance what it may, repent we must: or we shall be found wanting in the day of judgement. I need not tell you by whom we are to be tried. You know,—every one here must know,—that he is to be tried by Jesus Christ. Yes, that Saviour, whose name, and whose Father's name, the hardened sinner has so often taken in vain,—whose words were read in church, but he would not come, or, if he came, would not listen,—whose body and blood were set before him on the sacramental table, but he refused to be fed with that living bread, and to drink of that blessed cup,—that Saviour, at whose name, at whose words, at whose mercy, at whose love, the hardened sinner has all his life been making mock, will then be his judge. God "will judge the world (says St Paul, Acts xvii. 31) by that man whom he has ordained," even by his own Son, who in the beginning created man, and afterward was himself made man, and died for man, and knoweth everything that is in man. Is it a great comfort to have so good a judge? Is it a great comfort to the sincere believer that God should appoint his own Son, the Friend of man, the Advocate of man, to exercise judgement on

that great day? Can he feel more confidence in laying bare the weaknesses of his heart to Him who was in all things tempted like as we are? Do we feel certain that he will pity the poor and ignorant, inasmuch as he himself was poor, and chose out his apostles from the poor and ignorant? I grant it; and praised be God for it! Else who could stand before that dreadful judgement-seat, if justice were not to be tempered with mercy? But on the other hand it must needs heighten the fears of every hardened sinner, that our Saviour, his anointed King, gracious to all who will accept his grace, but, to all who will not, terrible, is to come in person, with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgement on all the wicked. Then shall they look on him whom they have pierced by their rebellious folly and ingratitude. They shall see him whom they have crucified,—crucified afresh, the apostle says,—by sinning and making mock at sin. O righteous Lord, who can abide thee on that dreadful day? Come to us mercifully in this world, we beseech thee, that we be not separated from thee in the world to come. For all, my brethren, all who are not united to God here, must never expect to be united to him hereafter. And who are these wretched people, who can never be permitted to dwell with God, or to taste the joys found only in his presence? They are the

persons spoken of in the text, the fools who have made a mock at sin, the disobedient, the careless, the impenitent, the sabbath-breaker, the drunkard, the lustful, the covetous, the worldly-minded, the hard-hearted. These persons, with their eyes open, have chosen death instead of life. Therefore death must be their portion, even that dreadful second death, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

If these things are really so, if the end of these foolish mockers is so certain and terrible, let us, my brethren, seek wisdom,—that true wisdom which cometh from above, and which is first pure, then peaceable, full of mercy and gentleness, and of all good works. Happy is the man who findeth this wisdom! whoso findeth her findeth life, and shall obtain the favour of the Lord. For God delights in her, as most agreeable to his nature, as most resembling himself, as his own gift, the offspring of his own perfection, as begetting honour, love, and hearty obedience to his will, as glorifying him the most truly, by best promoting the happiness of his creatures. Let us seek this wisdom, and seek it where it is to be found,—in the Bible, the book of wisdom and of life; more especially in the gospels, in the words of our blessed Saviour, his commands, his promises, his warnings, his entreaties. Parts of the Bible may be difficult

to understand: but these are not difficult, except to practise. In truth, were they as easy to perform, as they are to understand, we should no longer have need of praying for the coming of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God would be come already; and earth would be transfigured into heaven. Moreover while you seek for the seeds of wisdom in the Bible, you must not allow them to lie there. You must pick them up, and try to sow them in your own hearts, weeding your hearts at the same time, by examining them carefully in the light of the Bible, and plucking up everything growing therein, that the Bible condemns. But neither will the seeds we sow grow up, nor shall we be able to root up the weeds, unless God blesses our labours: and his blessing can only be obtained by diligent and fervent prayer. Therefore we must follow the command of St James, who tells us that, if we lack wisdom, we must ask it of God, who giveth liberally. All who lack wisdom must ask it of God; that is, all men who have ever lived: for all lack it. No one had ever enough of it: no one has enough of it to learn its value, but wishes earnestly for more.

What remains then, my brethren, seeing that we all lack wisdom, but that we all unite in praying for it to Him who alone can give it, to God, the Eternal Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost?

O Lord, who hast taught us by thy holy apostle, St James, to pray to thee for wise and understanding hearts, we kneel before thee in humble trust that, what thou hast commanded us to ask for, thou wilt grant us out of the treasury of thy mercies. Therefore, O Everlasting Wisdom, the Maker, Redeemer, and Governor of all things, let some comfortable beams from the great body of thy heavenly light descend upon us, to enlighten our dark minds, to quicken our dead hearts, to kindle them with the love of thee, and to guide our steps along the path of thy laws through the gloomy shades of this world, to that region of eternal light and bliss, where thou, most blessed Jesus, the Wisdom of God, and the Power of God, reignest with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, in glory, and majesty, world without end.

SERMON XXIII.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

LUKE xvi. 8, 9.

And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

THESE words are from the parable of the unjust steward; and there are two points in them by which, owing to a want of clearness in the translation, many persons have been a good deal puzzled. How comes our Lord Jesus, they ask, to commend the dishonest steward? How again comes he to bid us make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness? or, as most readers nowadays are likely to understand the words, to make the mammon of

unrighteousness our friend? If these two difficulties are removed, the parable is clear enough; and removed they may be in a very few words.

In the first place it is not our Lord Jesus Christ, who commends the unjust steward, but the steward's own lord and master; for this is the word which we should use nowadays: it is the steward's master, who, being struck by the cleverness he had shewn, commends it; just as people now might perhaps speak with admiration of the cleverness and skill displayed by a forger, in copying a very difficult bank note, without in the least intending by so doing to justify or excuse his crime. We should all agree in condemning that. All would agree in saying it was a sad pity the man had turned his cleverness to such a bad purpose. Still a person may do a bad thing in a sharp, handy manner; and we might praise the manner of doing it, while we utterly reprobated the thing itself. Just so is it with the steward's master in the parable. He can never have meant to praise his servant for defrauding him of his rents: but he was struck with the cleverness of the rogue's contrivance; and that he commended.

As to the other difficulty, it arises altogether from a change in the meaning of the little word *of;* which our forefathers often used, where we should now say *by*. Thus in the Bible we often find

such expressions as "taught *of* God," "warned *of* God." Here however, though in these days we should say "taught *by* God," "warned *by* God," still, as the words cannot mean anything else, there is no uncertainty. But there are many passages in which it is otherwise, and we may easily fall into mistakes. For instance, when we read in the first chapter of St Matthew, "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken *of* the Lord by the prophet,"—at first thought we should all take these words to mean, "what was spoken *concerning* the Lord by the prophet;" whereas their real meaning is, that "all this was done to the end that what was spoken *by* the Lord through the mouth of his prophet might be fulfilled." I have said thus much about this little word, because I believe very few persons read the New Testament, who do not stumble at my text; and numbers, even among those who have had what is called a good education, turn away from it in sad perplexity, unable to conceive how Jesus Christ could command them to make the mammon of unrighteousness their friend. And assuredly he does not so command them. What he bids us do, is to make friends *by*, or by the help of, the mammon of unrighteousness; that is, to employ the mammon of unrighteousness—mark the words,—to employ that

mammon, that riches, which is called unrighteous, because by so many it is gained dishonestly, and spent wickedly,—to employ that riches, which so many employ amiss to their soul's hurt, in making friends for ourselves, who shall receive us into everlasting habitations. In other words, our blessed Lord commands us to make such a use of our money, and of all our other talents, be they what they may, for the glory of God and the good of our brethren, that after our death it may please our God and Father to receive us into the heavenly abodes of never-ending peace and joy.

The parable having thus been cleared of its main difficulties, its general purport may be stated as follows. There was a rich landholder, who entrusted the management of a large estate to his steward. After a time charges were brought against the steward of wasting and injuring the property. So his master sent for him, told him he should turn him off, and bad him bring in his accounts. On hearing this the steward was in despair: he knew he should never get another place, after being sent away in such a manner: and he had saved no money to live upon. "I cannot dig," he said to himself; "I am ashamed to turn beggar. What shall I do?" At last he hit on a device, to gain the goodwill of his master's tenants, so that, when he had lost his home,

they might be ready to befriend him. He sent for them; and to the first that came he said, "How much does your rent amount to this year?" To understand this question, and the answer to it, you must bear in mind that it was not the custom in those days for the tenant to pay his landlord a fixed sum of money by way of rent. In those countries the land used to be let, and, I believe, still is let, on entirely different terms. The tenants are mostly poor men. They have no money to stock their farms, and to manage them on their own account. So the landlord supplies the stock, the seed, the tools, and whatever else is wanted for the cultivation of the farm: the tenant, or husbandman, finds the labour: and they divide the produce, whatever it may be, between them. The tenant keeps a certain portion, generally half, to himself, and pays over the remainder to his landlord. It is not hard to see what abuses and what dishonesty this mode of taking land opens a way to. The steward in the parable takes advantage of it, to make friends with the tenants at his master's cost. He asks the first farmer who comes to him, "How much is your rent this year?" And the man says to him, "A hundred measures of oil. My olives have turned out very well this year, and have given a good quantity of oil; and my landlord's share comes to a hundred measures." "What?" said the steward again to him; "a

hundred measures of oil from such a small olive-yard as yours? I am sure my master will be quite satisfied if you pay him half that. So take your bill, and write fifty." Having thus made a friend of the man who farmed the oliveyard, the steward repeated the same piece of roguery with a tenant who rented some corn-land. He, it seems, owed his landlord a hundred measures of wheat. But the steward again said, "It is too much for you to pay," and bad him take his bill, and set down fourscore. By some accident the steward's trick came to his master's ears; who was struck with its cleverness, and though he had been a sufferer by it, commended him for it,—commended him, not for the roguery, but for the forethought and ingenuity it shewed.

With this commendation the parable ends. What follows is our Lord's remark on the story, and the moral he would have us draw from it. "In this story (he says) you see an example, how the children of this world are mostly wiser in their generation than the children of light. In this wisdom I would have you follow them. I would have you too endeavour to make friends to yourselves,—not such friends as the unjust steward made; for he made only earthly friends, —nor by the same dishonest practices; for that would be against the law of God and man: but I would have you no less anxious to make friends,

no less careful, no less forecasting than he was. Only let your friends be heavenly friends, who will receive you into everlasting habitations. Do you wish to know how such friends are to be gained? They are to be gained by the help of the mammon of unrighteousness, by making the most of all your earthly means and opportunities of serving God and helping your neighbour."

It is impossible to read this parable, and our Lord's remark on it, without being struck by the broad assertion that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. The children of light are those who have been called to a knowledge of the Gospel, and who have given ear to that call, at least in some measure. They believe in Jesus Christ: at least they profess to believe in him. They come to church, and listen decently to what is read and taught there. Sometimes too they pray, or at least say their prayers, at home. They read a chapter in the Bible now and then. In one way or other they have learnt enough about religion to know the kind of life which, as Christians, they ought to lead,—that they ought to be holy, kind, humble, self-denying. Nay, they have even a wish to lead such a life. Thus much at least is needed to make what our Lord in the text calls a child of light. The child of this world, on the other hand, is one who,

like Gallio, the Roman governor, careth for none of these things. It is not necessary that he should be a profest unbeliever; only he never troubles his head about religion. He may be what the world calls a vicious man, or not; just as his heart happens to be set on what the world calls pleasure, or on what it calls honour, or gain. But whether he leads a vicious, or a decent reputable life, religion has no place in his heart: he lives without God in the world. Now of these two men, our Lord says, the child of this world is wiser in his generation than the child of light; wiser in his generation, mind; that is, wiser in his own line. Jesus does not say that he is wiser altogether: for that he is not. The folly of making a wrong choice, —the folly of hungering after that which is not bread, and setting his heart on things which cannot satisfy,—the folly of turning his back on his heavenly Father, of living in careless defiance or neglect of the Almighty Ruler of the world,—the folly of choosing to walk earnestly and busily in a path which leads to death and hell,—with all this heap of follies the child of this world is justly chargeable: and it is such a pitch of foolishness as must entitle him to the first and foremost place in folly. He is the fool of fools; because he chooses his course of life wrongly: whereas the child of light chooses, or at least professes to choose, his course of life rightly and wisely.

But after the choice has been made, a wonderful change takes place. He who chose his path like a fool, walks along it like a wise man; he who chose his like a wise man, walks along it like a fool. "The children of this world," says Jesus, "in their generation, are wiser than the children of light." How does this happen? you will naturally ask. How comes the fool to act so much more wisely than the wise man? and the wise man so much less wisely than the fool? My friends, there can be no doubt, the ground and cause of all this lies in that evil bias of our nature, which, unless the Spirit of God be within us to outweigh and check it, makes it so much easier for us to do wrong than to do right. At all events the fact is certain. The children of this world do, in their own line, and according to their own notions, act much more wisely than the children of light. It is impossible to walk through life with one's eyes open, and not perceive that this is so. The true child of this world is thoroughgoing, active, persevering. When he has made up his mind that this or that thing is desirable, he sets his heart upon having it. He casts about and considers, until he has hit on a plan of getting it: and as soon as he is satisfied that his plan is a good one, he straightway begins carrying it into effect. It matters little whether the object of his wishes be great or small, whether

it be an estate, or a horse: if the child of this world wants to buy it, he takes the proper steps for doing so, and loses no time. He does not say, "That horse would just suit me: I never saw one I liked half so much: so the next time I come this way, some six months hence, I will ask the price of it." He is too wise for that: he knows that six months hence the horse may no longer be on sale: he bethinks himself that no time is like the present; and if he finds that the horse is to be had for a fair price, he closes the bargain at once. It is the same whatever he engages in. If he is a man of business, he gives his mind to his business: he takes more delight in thinking about it, than about anything else. No subject interests him so much. Any first-rate book that treats of it, he would be sure to study; and probably would have its chief rules and directions at his fingers ends, ready to be applied on all occasions. If he cannot learn from books, he takes care to learn from men. He wastes no opportunity of talking about his business with persons of great experience in it. He is glad to hear what they may have to say upon it; any practical hints or remarks which they may drop, he stores up and treasures for future use. In a word he lives in his business, and for his business, and has very few cares or thoughts

out of it. Such is the child of this world, if he happens to be a man of business: and assuredly he may well be called wise in his generation. For he has the wisdom to act up to his own notions. He places his happiness in his business; and thither he goes to seek it. He thinks success in his worldly calling the best thing that can happen to him: and that success he does everything man can do to ensure, by diligence, by thought, by care, by painstaking, and very often by denying himself many pleasures and comforts. In a word, Mammon is the god he has chosen for himself: and he serves his god, as a god ought to be served, with all his heart, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. He is wise therefore in his way.

Or suppose that, instead of a man of business, the child of this world happens to be a man of pleasure,—will he still be wise in his generation? Yes, he will still be wise. He will not indeed shew his wisdom in the same way as the man of business: because the road of pleasure is different from the road of business. But in his own way, and on his own road, he will shew his wisdom just as much. He will seek pleasure and amusement with the same eagerness, with the same activity, with the same perseverance, with which the other seeks gain and profit. The true pleasure-hunter, who makes that his object in life, will follow after

it early and late. Who so regular as he at the beershop, if he is poor, or at the tavern and gaming-house, if he is rich? He is sure to be seen at every place of amusement, at every merrymaking, every feast and fair, that he can contrive to find his way to. He is fond of keeping company with persons of his own sort. When he is with them, what delight does he take in telling over his own adventures to them, and in hearing theirs! His head is full of lewd stories and foolish songs. Thus he too is wise in his generation. For he makes his belief, his words, and his deeds tally. He has placed his happiness in pleasure; and pleasure he thinks of, pleasure he talks of, pleasure he follows after, from year's end to year's end. Everybody who knows him must see that pleasure is the great end of his life. To pleasure he gives himself up. He has chosen Belial, the god of lewdness and debauchery, for his god: and Belial he serves, as the other served Mammon, with all his heart, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.

This then is the wisdom of the children of this world, that what they do they do thoroughly,—that what they profess to think desirable, they strive in earnest to obtain,—that they do not allow a little thing to stop them, or lure them aside, when pursuing the object of their wishes,—

that they worship their false gods with a true and zealous worship.

Turn your eyes now to the children of light, and tell me whether you can see the like marks of wisdom in them. We profess to make heaven the object of our lives: are we really and truly following after it? Are we as active, as zealous, as steady and persevering, in seeking after our heavenly inheritance, as the children of this world are in seeking after gain and pleasure? Are we as much, or half as much, in earnest? Do we never say, six months hence will be time enough to think seriously, and to repent and turn to God? Do we take delight in the best book that was ever written, and keep its rules at our fingers ends, in order to square our behaviour by them? Are we anxious to seek the company, and listen to the discourse, of such as honour God and keep his commandments? Do we examine ourselves regularly, as a merchant examines his accounts? Do we, on perceiving a fault in our christian life, set about thinking how we may best avoid it for the future, and then, having laid down our plan, carry it immediately and steadily into practice? Do we rejoice as much in the Lord's day, as the man of business rejoices in his day of sale, and the man of pleasure in his day of amusement? Or do you not often love your Sunday rather as a day of

worldly rest,—which, blessed be God! he has made it,—than as the day set apart for coming to God, and communing with him in his holy temple? Alas! too sure and certain is it, that we do none of these things. We serve our God, the great Maker and Ruler of the world, with less zeal, with less affection, with less heartiness, with less truth, than the man of business his Mammon, or the man of pleasure his Belial.

This is the great fault and frailty of our christian life. We do our work by halves. Is this wise? is it reasonable? is it not the height of madness? to be so sluggish, so indolent, so listless, so false-hearted, in the service of the God who made us, and of the Saviour whom we declare to have redeemed us,—in the pursuit of the joys of heaven, which we declare to be the only true joys, and which are to last for ever. If you did not believe the Gospel, if you did not profess to be Christians, I might then say you were wise in your generation; I might then exhort you to go on in your present course. But seeing that you do believe in Christ, seeing that you do hope and wish for heaven, take a lesson from the enemy, learn the wisdom of the serpent. Let us imitate the zeal, the perseverance, the prudence, the courage, the unweariableness, in a word, the wisdom, which the children of this world shew in the pursuit of their

vain and perishable, of their ruinous and deadly objects. Let us be as active and as determined to please God, as they are to please themselves. Then, on that great day, when all the shows of this world shall have passed away, and every man's work shall be made manifest,—while their wisdom turns out to be the excess of folly, and their labour to have been vanity and vexation,—while, in return for the wind which they have been sowing so diligently, they are reaping the whirlwind of wrath,—the God, who for his Son's sake will vouchsafe to accept our services, and to look with favour on our imperfect attempts to employ the mammon of unrighteousness in his service, will receive us into everlasting habitations.

SERMON XXIV.

THE EVIL EYE.

MATTHEW XX. 15.

Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

SUCH was the question which the householder in the parable put to the labourers, when they murmured against him for having been bountiful to their fellow-labourers, while he was only just to them. You probably remember that this householder had gone out early in the morning, and hired men to work in his vineyard for a penny a-day. But the men he hired at first were not enough: so he went out at different times during the day to get more hands. All who would engage with him he hired, but without any fixed agreement, merely promising generally to pay them what was fair and just. In the evening, when work was over, he told his steward to pay the men, and, though some of them had

worked only one hour, to give them all a whole day's wages. Each was to have his penny. Whereupon those who had been in the vineyard all the day, instead of rejoicing at the good fortune of their fellows, thought themselves hardly treated, because they had only received their due. "They murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, who have borne the burthen and heat of the day." "So I have," said the master of the vineyard to one of these murmurers: "I have paid you alike: but you have received your just due: you have been paid the sum you agreed for; take that thine is, and go thy way. May not I do as I like with my own money? If I choose to make these other men a present of a day's wages, what hurt, or what wrong is that to thee? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" These last words I have chosen for my text; and it is about them that I am going to preach to you to-day. In other words, I intend my sermon to be on that very evil thing, an evil eye.

Some perhaps may here ask, what is meant by an evil eye? I answer, that in different places of Scripture different things may be meant by it. But what is meant in the text is clear enough. The evil eye meant here is such an eye as the labourers in the vineyard had, when they looked

askance at their neighbour's good fortune. An evil eye therefore is a grudging eye. To say of any one in this sense that he has an evil eye, is the same as saying that he is of a grudging turn of mind. Now this evil eye, this grudging turn of mind, is far commoner than it ought to be. We have still too often cause to ask the question in the text, is thine eye evil? Nor is the evil confined to persons of any one class. High and low, rich and poor, young and old, each may have an evil eye. For examples of this in old times we have only to search our Bibles: where we find that not even the greatest and most powerful persons, not even those to whom God has given the most, are safe from this dangerous malady. When Ahab, the king of Israel, in the midst of his possessions, grudged Naboth his vineyard, and wanted to take it from him, was not his an evil eye? Again, did not it shew an evil eye in Haman (who was the favourite of king Ahasuerus), to call his friends together, and, after telling them of his riches and power, to say to them, "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate, who will not bow to me, nor do me reverence." Surely Ahab might have been satisfied with the riches of Samaria. But no: his evil eye grudged Naboth a poor vineyard; and so, though he was king of Israel, he went to his

royal palace, heavy and displeased, and laid himself down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would not eat. So might Haman have been satisfied with the reverence paid him by all the princes of Persia. But no: his evil eye stung his heart, because one single Jew would not do him homage; and he spake those striking words which I have just repeated to you: "All this availeth me nothing: all my riches and power and honours together cannot make me happy, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

Such is the form which the malady of an evil eye takes in the great of this world. It quite destroys their relish for the thousand earthly goods they have, because of some paltry trifle which they have not. How general a malady must this be then, when even the highest are not safe from it! How bad and painful, what a blighter of happiness must it be, when it can thus turn the most prosperous lot into bitterness! Above all, how dangerous must it be, when it could lead to such wickedness as the murder of Naboth, and Haman's plot for destroying all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus!

But let us come down a few steps in the ladder of life, and look at the middle classes of society: shall we find the evil eye among them? Among

them too, I grieve to say, we often find the evil eye,—not indeed shewing itself in murders, and in plots for a general massacre: such bad things, God be praised! are so entirely out of our power, that we do not feel so much as tempted to them. In these days the evil eye does not shew itself in these horrible ways: but it does shew itself in a thousand ugly shapes, and under every one of them breeds misery and mischief. What are all those jealousies and rivalries, which are for ever dividing neighbour from neighbour, friend from friend, and sometimes even brother from brother, and sister from sister,—what are these but the fruits of an evil eye? Here you may see a man repining, because he is not noticed by the great man of the country, while another is. There a man is vexing himself, because his neighbour is more popular, or enjoys more influence, or has more skill and activity and enterprise. In a third place is a family divided against itself, because some one member of it happens to be a greater favorite at home or abroad than the others. Hence that one is envied and hated by those who are nearest to him in blood, just as Joseph was hated by his brethren, because they saw that their father Jacob loved him most of all. Let none say that these little jealousies and rivalries are trifling faults, not worthy to be

named in a sermon. If they are trifling faults, then envy, and hatred, and malice, and uncharitableness are trifling faults: for the jealousies and rivalries I have been speaking of are neither more nor less than the envy, hatred, malice, and uncharitableness of our nature, shewing themselves in little things. True, you will find nothing about such jealousies and rivalries in Scripture. But you will find the same thing under another name. The word which our translators used, to express evil jealousies and rivalries, is emulations. Turn then to the Epistle to the Galatians, and you will there see what St Paul thinks of emulations, that is, as we should say in modern English, of jealousies and rivalries, such as I have been speaking of. His words are these: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, hatred, variance, emulations." These emulations then are works of the flesh, and that manifestly. In other words, they so plainly spring from the corrupt and evil, from the ungodly and selfish principle in man, that there can be no question or dispute about it. Now observe what sort of company the apostle classes emulations with: "The works of the flesh are these; adultery, fornication, idolatry, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and such like" (Gal. v. 19, 21). Such, accord-

ing to St Paul, is the parentage and lineage of these emulations, of these rivalries and jealousies, which people nowadays think it no great harm to indulge in. The parent of these emulations is the flesh; for they are the works of the flesh. The brethren of emulations are hatred and variance. The children of emulations are wrath and strife in families, seditions in the state, and envyings in the bosom of individuals. That is to say, a spirit of rivalry in families will lead to wrath and strife; a spirit of rivalry in kingdoms will lead to seditions and disturbances. Even when this evil spirit is penned up within a single bosom, it will rankle there and fill it with envy.

Having thus seen the effects of this evil eye, of this jealous grudging cast of mind, first in the highest, and then in the middle ranks, let us consider thirdly how it shews itself among the poor. That they are liable to this hateful disease quite as much as others, is clear from the parable whence the text is taken. For who were the people that murmured against the owner of the vineyard for being generous and bountiful to their fellows, when he had only been just to them? Were they not common labourers, who had been hired to work for the day? Day-labourers then, and their wives, and their children, may all have an evil eye. But as the parable proves that the labouring poor may

have this evil eye, so it likewise teaches us the way in which the evil eye most frequently shews itself in them. In them it generally shews itself in a grudging temper, which grumbles and teazes itself, because some good has been done to a neighbour, which all do not share alike. Now this is truly the evil eye,—a disorder which, I fear, is quite as common among the poor of England now, as it can have been among the labourers of Judea eighteen hundred years ago. The disorder then being so common among all ranks, can we spend the remainder of this evening better than in considering how very evil an evil and grudging eye must be?

And first among the evils of an evil eye I will put its glaring folly. If a man got any good by grieving at his neighbour's better fortune, there might be some excuse, or at least some worldly wisdom in doing so. But now, torment and vex yourselves ever so much, you will not be a farthing the richer. If you cried at your neighbour's good luck from morning till night, you could not cry a halfpenny into your pocket. What folly then, because you are not so fortunate as you want to be, to make yourselves less happy than you need be!

But further, consider the unreasonableness of this grudging evil eye. May not a rich man be bountiful to a few, without being bountiful to all?

Even if he did not choose to be bountiful to any one, he would not be answerable to you. To his God, who, after entrusting him with a store of good things, has commanded him by his apostle to give, and to distribute,—to God the niggardly rich man is indeed accountable: and heavy will his reckoning be. But to man he is not accountable: as far as man is concerned, he has a right to hoard if he will. Now if the rich man has a right, so far as this world is concerned, to give to none, —much more has he a right to give only to a few, and to choose who those few shall be. Suppose you had a penny loaf in your pocket, and met four hungry men. You might, if you pleased, divide the loaf among the four. But you might also choose to give it all to one. You might think within yourself, this little loaf will be nothing among four; but it may stay the hunger of one. Would not you have a full right to give your loaf all to one? and would not you have a further right to choose which of the four you would give it to? One might be older than the others; and perhaps you might like to give it to him. Or one might have a child at home; and you might say to yourself, "That man must be more in want of it, because he has a child to provide for; I will give it all to him." Would you not have a right to do so? If any one questioned you about what

you had done, would you not think it enough to say, "The loaf was mine, and I gave it as I thought proper? Is not it lawful to do as I will with my own?" Now what is true of this loaf, and these four men, is true more or less of all bounty. So long as a man gives a due portion of his worldly goods to the poor and needy, he has a right to use his own judgement as to the kinds of distress he will relieve: and it is most unreasonable in those who are passed over, to complain because they are not relieved also. If I had a sum of money to give away, and chose to set it apart for the sick, would the healthy have any ground to grumble? Or if I chose to set it apart for the old, would the young have any cause to complain? Nay, suppose that one sick person happened to be passed over when all the other sick were relieved, or that one old person was passed over, when all the others received something, people might wonder at the exception; but none would have a right to complain. The money being mine, I have a right, humanly speaking, to bestow it as I think best.

This brings me to the injustice of an evil eye. Nothing can be more unjust than the complaints one hears from the discontented poor in every corner of the land. One cannot go east, or west, or north, without hearing people murmuring,—

"It is very hard I should be left out of such a charity; I have quite as much right to it as neighbour such a one." The answer to such complaints is very simple: True, you have the same right as your neighbour; and that is none at all. Alms are gifts; and a man can have no right to a gift. To your wages, to what you earn, you have a right: just as the labourers in the vineyard had a right to their penny. But they had no right to more: and when they grumbled, because the landlord, after paying them their penny, did not give them something over, they were rebuked for their envious covetousness and warned against an evil eye. Can anything then be more unjust, than being angry with a man, because his bounty does not reach to you? Nothing, I was going to say; but on second thought there is one thing more unjust: the finding fault with your neighbour, because he has been more fortunate and more favoured than you. Yet how many do this! How many are bitter against their neighbours, and look on them with an evil eye, because the overflowings of a rich man's bounty happen to run toward them! The likelihood is, that they are in some way or other more deserving, either as being more in want, or better behaved: for the worst are always the chief grumblers. But even if they are not more deserving, still the question

in the parable returns: May I not do what I will with my own? May I not give to this family if I please, without giving to you also?

All however that I have said hitherto against an evil eye,—its folly, its unreasonableness, and its injustice,—all this is a mere nothing compared with its unchristian wickedness. We Christians have a Master to obey. He has given us a law; and we should follow it. He offers us his Spirit; and we should seek it. Now the great principle of the christian law, the prime fruit of the christian spirit, is love. This spirit you must have; and its fruits you must have; else you are none of Christ's. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. viii. 9). But how can you flatter yourselves that you have the spirit of Christ, if you have so little love for your neighbour, as not even to rejoice when good befalls him? The Scripture rule is, "Love your neighbour as yourself." Do you rejoice when good happens to yourself? By that rule you ought to rejoice when good happens to your neighbour. A good man rejoices whenever good is done. If it be done to himself, he thanks God for it: and if it be not done to himself, still he thanks God for it; because somebody at all events is better off, somebody is less wretched, less hungry, less naked, less comfortless, to-day than yesterday. Is not

this a reasonable, an amiable, a christian motive for rejoicing? Is not it on the other hand an unreasonable and hateful, and even devilish motive for repining? God at the beginning made all things good: and the nearer they are brought back to that original good, the more the children of God rejoice. On the other hand the devil brought evil into the world: he brought upon earth the evil of sin, out of which all other ills take their rise. Just then as it belongs to the sons of God to rejoice that good is done, so it belongs to the children of the Evil One to grieve when good is done. Choose ye then, whose children ye will be, —the children of God, or the children of the Evil One. If you would be the children of God, pray to him to give you a good eye. If you would be the children of the Evil One, go on indulging an evil eye. But remember, you cannot be a mixture between the two. You cannot have an evil eye, and be God's children: God's children must have a good eye.

Some however may perhaps tell me, "It is so hard to be contented; above all, under poverty and distress." I believe it: and therefore I will conclude by pointing out a way in which you may all be discontented without offense. If you must be discontented, let it be at your lack of godliness. There is no treasure half so precious, none half so

lasting; there is none above all, whereof an evil-eyed and discontented person stands half so much in need. So, if you must be covetous, let it be according to the covetousness which St Paul recommends. Covet earnestly the best gifts, especially the excellent gift of christian charity, which will enable you to look on your neighbour as a part and portion of yourself. This is the crown and perfection of the christian spirit: and there is no attaining to it, except by conquering and killing self. *Self*, remember, was the worst seed in Adam's apple. Toward God it is self-will, which is rebellion: toward man it is self-love, which is hard-heartedness. It was to root out this evil self from us, and to put in love in its room, that Christ died, and the Holy Ghost comes. Let not that death and that coming be in vain for you. But covet, since you must covet, with a godly covetousness; and cease not to complain, cease not to cry out, weary the ears of God with prayer, until he frees you from all selfishness, and from that worst mark of it, a grudging and evil eye.

SERMON XXV.

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENSE;

OR,

THE CHRISTIAN ON HIS TRIAL.

Acts xxiv. 16.

Herein I do exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men.

These words were spoken by St Paul, when he was standing before Felix, the Roman governor, to answer the charges brought against him by the Jews. Seldom has there been a struggle, which to human eyes must have seemed more unequal, than that which took place on that day before the tribunal of Felix. On the one side were ranged the whole nation of the Jews, represented by their highpriest and elders, thirsting for the blood of one man, and bringing charge after charge against him, by the mouth of a practised counsellor, who had doubtless been trained in pleading causes, and

was skilled in all the niceties of the law. Such was the force arrayed against Paul,—a whole nation, all his countrymen, coming forward in the persons of the rulers of their church, and with a counsellor able to turn the balance of the law to his prejudice. And what was on Paul's side? So far as men's eyes could see, only Paul himself. To all appearance he stood alone, without a lawyer to plead for him, without a friend of any kind to take his part, or even to cheer him with a look betokening interest in his behalf. But was this really the case? was Paul indeed alone? No: he was enabled to say, as his Master had said before him, "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me" (John viii. 16). The Father was indeed with him. Could the eyes of the people present have been opened to see the things of the unseen world, how different would the trial have appeared to them! It still would have been most unequal: but the first would have become last, and the last would have become first. They would have seen at once that the host of accusers had no chance of carrying their point against the apostle. They would have seen that all the superiority, all the strength, all the certainty of success lay on the side of the one poor prisoner Paul. For they would have seen that, poor and friendless as he was to outward show, he had God

and the Spirit of God with him. With these to aid him, what has anybody to fear? How can he fear man, whose breath is in his nostrils, when his help is in the living God?

But some of you may perhaps say, "Be it so: let the advantage have been on the side of the Jews, or on St Paul's side; how does this concern us? what practical lesson are we to draw from it?" My friends, it concerns us very nearly; and we may draw a very wholesome lesson from it, if we only make allowance for the difference of circumstances between our days and St Paul's. We are none of us, God be praised! likely to be brought to trial before a heathen governor for believing in Jesus Christ. This was Paul's trial. It was the trial of many holy men besides in those days of fierce persecution, when almost all the rule and authority of this world was in the hands of idolaters. But it is not likely to be our trial; because the kingdoms of this world have since become, at least in name, the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ. But though we have not the same kind of trial that Paul had, are not Christians even in these times tried in divers ways? For instance, are we not all on our trial before a world which has no higher law, no more certain judgement, no purer righteousness, than that of heathen morality? and are there not many ever ready to start up and

accuse the faithful servant of Christ? Is he not liable to be laughed at for doing and saying what he believes and knows to be his duty? Is he not liable to fall into the company of such as care not for Christ, and will mock and scoff at those who do? Is he not liable to be exclaimed against as over-precise and foolishly scrupulous, for doing what he knows he ought to do, and for not doing what he knows he ought not to do? These then are among his trials. When any of these trials happens to any of us, we shall do well to think of Paul standing alone before Felix, and to endeavour to act as wisely, as bravely, as much like a true Christian as he did. The strength, the power, the numbers of this world may indeed seem to be against us; we may be two or three against a swarm: but if we are standing up in behalf of any the least of Christ's commandments, the real strength, the real power, the superiority of every sort will be on our side. For remember, God is not dead: he is not changed: he is the living and eternal God, the same to-day that he was yesterday, the same two thousand years hence, that he was two thousand years ago. If he watched over his servant Paul, when brought into jeopardy for the sake of Christ, in like manner will he watch over you, if you are at any time brought into jeopardy for the sake of Christ. I do not say that

you will escape from the contest without a wound. Christ's soldiers must expect to be wounded: they must expect in days of persecution to have their human bodies wounded: they must expect to have their earthly feelings wounded in days of irreligious mockery. Christ's soldiers may be wounded, and will be wounded. This is the way that God takes to exercise our patience, and to mortify and kill the proud flesh, which naturally grows up around the heart. But though Christ's soldiers may be wounded, they cannot be slain: for they that believe in Christ, and love him, and serve him faithfully, even though they die, yet shall they live. As to being conquered, how can they be conquered, when God has promised them the victory for the sake of his beloved Son?

In order however that, when we are brought to trial in any way before the world, on account of our christian faith or practice, we may be enabled to meet our accusers as fearlessly as Paul met his, we must prepare ourselves against such trials, as Paul did, by exercising ourselves to have a conscience void of offense both toward God and toward man. The accusation which the Jews brought against Paul by the mouth of their spokesman, Tertullus, may be divided into three charges. In the first place they charged him with being a "mover of sedition," or a disturber of the

public peace, "among all the Jews throughout the world." Their next charge was, that he "was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes," in other words, one of the chief preachers of the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. Lastly they charged him with having gone about to profane the temple. Now what answer does Paul give to these three charges? To the first charge, that he was a stirrer of sedition among the Jews, he answers, that after an absence of many years, he had come a few days before to Jerusalem to bring alms and offerings to his countrymen: and that, during his stay there, he had never been found haranguing or exciting the people, either in the temple, or in any of the synagogues, or in any other part of the city. The second charge, that he was a ringleader of the Nazarenes, he does not deny. For the being a Nazarene, or a believer in Christ, was not then a crime by the Roman law. On the contrary he confesses that he worships the God of his fathers, according to the way which they chose to call a heresy, believing all the things written in the law and in the prophets, trusting in God, as his accusers themselves did, that there would be a resurrection of the dead. "Meantime (he says), while I am looking forward to this resurrection, I exercise myself, I take all pains and give all diligence, that I may in all things have a conscience

void of offense both toward God and toward man." As to the third charge, that of having profaned the temple, Paul says: "So far is that charge from the truth, that, on the contrary, I had just been purifying myself in the temple, according to the ordinances of the Mosaic law, quietly, without any crowd or disturbance." He then winds up his defense with that honest and confident appeal to his accusers: "Let them declare if they found any evil doing in me, when I was examined before the council; unless indeed it was an offense to exclaim, that I was called in question touching the resurrection of the dead."

In this way did St Paul call on his accusers themselves to bear witness to the innocency of his life. He challenges them to bring forward a single unlawful act that he had committed, unless it was unlawful to say that he was accused touching the resurrection of the dead. Thus on the strength of his innocence was he, a single man, enabled to stand his ground against a host of powerful and bloodthirsty accusers. It is in this way that our heavenly Father, even when he does not specially interpose in behalf of his servants, by openly taking their part, and working a miracle to preserve them, still often vouchsafes to assist them. No miracle was wrought to save Paul: the trial went on like any other trial: yet Paul was not condemned.

For God had given him a mouth and a wisdom, which his enemies could neither gainsay nor condemn. His mouth was not the mouth of human eloquence; nor was his wisdom the studied wisdom of human schools. His wisdom was the wisdom of plain truth: his mouth was the mouth of blameless innocence. These were his weapons: and they were sufficient to defend him, single as he was, against a host of powerful accusers.

Now we too, my brethren, as I said above,—we too, if we are faithful and diligent servants of our Lord and Master, Christ, are on our trial. Every Christian is on his trial before a godless world, just as Paul was before the heathen governor. There are many persons, who neither love religion, nor hate it. Like Gallio, they care for none of these things: they do not trouble their heads about the matter. But they do not like that others should be better than they are. Therefore every story which can throw discredit on the piety, or on the understanding, of a religious neighbour,—every story which sets him in a blamable or laughable point of view,—every such story is sure to be favorably received by them, and to meet with a ready hearing. It is before persons of this worldly, careless, godless spirit, that the servants of Christ are ever standing a severe trial.

Again there are others, who, to judge by their

bitter way of speaking, positively dislike, and seem almost to hate such as are in earnest about worshiping and serving God. They are never so happy as when bringing accusations against them, when picking holes in their characters, and holding them up to scorn and reproach. If they can find a fair-seeming plea for taxing one religious person with insincerity, a second with being weak and foolish, a third with absurdity and affectation, a fourth with hastiness of speech, or sharpness, sourness, or gloominess of temper, they seem quite to rejoice in sitting down to such a rich feast of envy, hatred, malice, and uncharitableness; and their only anxiety is, to get a number of their neighbours to partake of it. These bitter framers and spreaders of railing accusations against their more religious brethren may be compared to the Jewish accusers of Paul: while the other class of careless worldlyminded persons, who give ear to these accusations, may be compared to the Roman governors before whom he was tried.

Thus we see, the Christian is on his trial before the world. The bitterly irreligious are his accusers: the indolently, carelessly irreligious, who make up the great bulk of mankind, are his judges. How then is he to defend himself on this trial? He must endeavour to defend himself as Paul did, by the wisdom of truth, and by in-

nocency of life. No other defense will be of avail. Accordingly this is the advice which St Peter gives to the first Christians. He tells them (1. ii. 15) with well-doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. And again (iii. 16) he exhorts them to have a good conscience,—that is, in St Paul's words, a conscience void of offense, toward God and toward men,—"that, whereas they speak evil of you as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed, that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." And again (ii. 12) he says to them, "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, through your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

This is just what St Paul did. He not only put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and the malice of wicked and cruel men; but by his diligence, his zeal, the strength of his faith, and the purity of his life, he converted numbers of the Gentiles, founded many churches among them, and led them to glorify God. Even Felix, the Roman governor, was so struck by what he saw and heard, that, after the trial was over, he sent for Paul privately, that he might hear him speak of Christ and his doctrine. And who knows but that

we too,—if we exercised ourselves, like St Paul, to keep a conscience void of offense both toward God and man,—might be the blessed means of awakening some relation, some friend, some neighbour, or even some enemy, to take more thought about God, and to set a higher price on heavenly things, than he has hitherto been wont to do? "Cast your bread upon the waters (says the Preacher); for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eccl. xi. 1). "Blessed (says the prophet) are they that sow beside all waters" (Isaiah xxxii. 20). We are to sow, you see, beside *all* waters. And what are we to sow? We are to sow the good seed. A word in season, for instance,—that is good seed. A kind action, or a mild answer,—that again is good seed. But the best and most fruitful seed of all is the quiet example of a holy and godly life. Sow that seed then beside *all* waters. Whithersoever you go, whatever you do, in your hours of work, in seasons of business, in times of leisure, at home with your families, abroad among strangers, in all your goings, and all your doings, leave behind you the trace of a good example: shew by your life that you believe in Christ; live according to your belief; let people see that herein you exercise yourselves, to have a conscience void of offense, not only toward God, but also toward man, nor only toward man, but

also toward God. You must serve them both: you must do your duty to both: you must love both. You must love and serve God for his own sake: you must love and do your duty to man for God's sake;—because God has commanded it,—because you are all children of the same Father,—because you are all bought with the same price,—because you are all fellow-servants of the same Saviour.

This is what St Paul did, when he exercised himself to have a conscience void of offense. Do you suppose that he is sorry now for having thus exercised himself? Do you suppose that he wishes now he had not exercised himself so much? that he wishes he had not taken so much pains to do his duty? Do you suppose he grudges the labour and self-denial it cost him during his life, to keep himself in all things pure and holy? Even in this world they who sow plenteously reap plenteously; and still more plenteous is their harvest in the next world. St Paul sowed plenteously: he was in labours more abundant: and so there was laid up for him a crown of glory. Would we receive a crown like his? we must first be like him in his labours. We are not indeed called upon to suffer hunger and thirst and persecution and nakedness, as he did. From all these trials, so hard to the infirmity of our flesh, God has mer-

cifully spared us. Nor are we called to bear the brunt of an accusation from Jews, and of a trial for our lives before heathens. But we too have our trials to bear and to stand: and if we bear them and stand them as he did,—if we abound in faith, in love, in long-suffering, in patience, in all the work of the Lord,—if we are diligent in exercising ourselves as he did, to have a conscience always void of offense both toward God and toward man,—we shall find, when the end comes, that God has not overlooked our endeavours to serve and please him: we shall find, unworthy as we are, that for us also has his goodness laid up a crown of reward.

SERMON XXVI.

SHAKE IT OFF;

OR,

ST PAUL AND THE VIPER.

MARK xvi. 18.

They shall take up serpents.

WE read in St Mark, that, when our Saviour, after his resurrection, commanded the apostles to go and preach the gospel to every child of man, he promised that certain blessed signs should follow those who were converted to him. They were to have the power of casting out devils, of speaking with new tongues, of healing the sick; and among these signs was the one mentioned in the text: "They shall take up serpents." Believers were to have the power of handling venomous snakes, without suffering from their poison. I need not remind you how appropriate a sign this was. A

serpent is the emblem used in the Bible to signify that evil spirit, who first brought sin into the world. It was under the form of a serpent, that Satan tempted Eve. It was between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, that God said he would put enmity. The devil is called in the Revelation the old Serpent. Now when Christ had triumphed over Satan, and had bruised the Serpent's head, what miracle could be fitter to accompany that victory, and to be a sign of it to the world, than that Christ's brethren and followers should be empowered to take up serpents? It was visibly proclaiming to the world that the Serpent had been conquered, that Christ had taken out his sting, and that he could no longer kill the souls of men.

Such doubtless was the spiritual truth signified by the power which our Saviour gave his people, to take up serpents. But apart from any spiritual sense and import, the thing itself was very extraordinary, and was well fitted to strike all who saw it as a proof of more than human power. So accordingly it was deemed by the people of Melita or Malta, the island on which St Paul was cast away, when they saw him take up a serpent, without being hurt by it. The story of that event, as related in the last chapter of the Acts, has several points in it from which we may draw a profitable

lesson; and I purpose therefore to make it the subject of my present sermon.

The ship in which St Paul was going to Rome having been wrecked off the coast of Melita, the crew, we are told, escaped all safe to land. Here the people of the island received them kindly, and lighted a great fire, to cheer and warm them. "And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the people saw the venomous creature hang on Paul's hand, they said, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. But Paul shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Whereupon the inhabitants of the island changed their minds about him, and said that he was a god."

Such is the account which St Luke gives us of St Paul's shaking off the serpent from his hand: and such were the effects produced on these islanders, first by seeing the apostle's danger, and then by witnessing his miraculous escape from it. Now in this account, short and simple as it is, there are several things from which, as I have already said, we may learn a profitable lesson.

First, we may learn from it the way in which our heavenly Father is wont to preserve his duti-

ful and obedient children. The viper is allowed to fasten on Paul, and to put his life in seeming danger; but the viper is not allowed to hurt him. Now this, if we leave out the miraculous part of the story, agrees with God's usual method of dealing with the children of men. He will often try to humble us, by bringing us into danger or trouble, and then will exalt his name, and try to make us thankful, by delivering us from it. What are providential escapes, but so many proofs that this is one of God's ways of dealing with his creatures? Almost every one has heard of some providential escape or other. Many of you, no doubt, have stories that you could tell of such escapes; how one man was near being killed by some accident, but was mercifully preserved, without losing either life or limb; how another man was brought to death's door by sickness, and then was restored to health, when his friends were in despair of his recovery. Escapes and deliverances of this kind are so common, that almost every one can mention some example of them. Now to whom are such escapes owing? Truly they are as certainly, though not so visibly, owing to God's providence, to his protecting mercy and goodness, as it was owing to that same merciful goodness, that Paul shook off the serpent, and suffered no harm.

Everybody, I say, must needs be aware that

God often lets us fall into danger, and then, when all hope seems over, draws us out of it again. Now if he does this, you may be sure he does it for a good reason. It would be an easy thing for him, if he were so minded, to build a wall, as it were, round the dwellings of the righteous, so as to keep every evil thing far from them. He might preserve us not from evil only, but likewise from the dread and risk of it. Why then does he take a different course? Because, if we never knew what fear and danger is, it would make us too careless and presumptuous. As soon as we grow accustomed to the blessing of health, or to the blessing of fine weather, or to the blessing of quiet times, or to that of fruitful seasons,—when we have grown used to any of these blessings, from having been permitted to enjoy them long together, we are apt to forget who it is that gives us all these things: we are apt to forget that we owe them all to God, and that, were it not for his goodness to us, we should have neither rain nor sunshine, neither health nor strength, neither peace nor plenty. Therefore God, to keep alive in our minds a sense of our entire dependence upon him, will often allow us to fall into trouble. Sometimes he sends a sickness, and withers our strength. Sometimes he sends a dearth through the land, and cuts short the provision of man and

beast. Sometimes he suffers the public peace to be disturbed by wicked men. Do you suppose that God does all this, because he has any pleasure in afflicting his creatures? Not so: he does it for our good, to open our eyes, that we may see and feel how without him we are just nothing. When this purpose has been answered, when we come to our senses, and repent of our ingratitude and hard-hearted forgetfulness, and cry to God for mercy and help, he is ever ready to take the scourge off from our shoulders. He steps in, and delivers us from the evil. In a word, God allows his people to fall into danger, just as he allowed the viper to fasten on Paul's hand: and this he does to make us humble. But often, when the danger is at the worst, when a bystander would say, there is no hope, he delivers us from the danger, and we are not hurt by it: just as St Paul was not hurt by the poisonous snake, which he shook off into the fire. Surely the thought of these deliverances ought to make us all thankful. They ought to teach us, that it is God who reigns, and who orders everything upon earth, as well as in heaven.

In truth it is still as it was in the days of David. "The eye of the Lord is still upon them that fear him, upon them that put their trust in his mercy" (Psalm xxxiii. 18). Would you, my brethren, have God watch over you? would you be under

the protection of an eye that never closes, of a love that never sleeps? Fear God, and put your trust in his mercy. Observe the encouraging gentleness and beauty of these last words. We are not required to trust in God's power. Much less, sinners that we are, are we required to trust in his justice. It is in the mercy, the goodness, the lovingkindness of God, that we are required to trust, with a promise that, if we do so, God's eye will watch over us and preserve us. Do you need a further assurance, that, although God no longer interposes by signs and wonders, so as to alter the course of nature, for the deliverance of his servants, he is still ever careful of them? You will find it in the words of St Peter, taken from the 34th Psalm: "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous; and his ears are open to their prayers." What more can you wish for than such a promise? To have the ear of a great man is reckoned by many worldlings the height of prosperous fortune. The ear of a great man! Poor groveling ambition! What real good could it do any one, if he had it? The Bible offers you something far higher: it offers you the ear of the King of kings. It tells you that the ear of the Maker and Ruler of the universe shall be open to your prayers. What makes you hesitate? what are you afraid of? why do you not come forward,

and lay hold of the boon which the lovingkindness of your God and Father vouchsafes to you? He is sitting on his throne: his ears are open: he is listening: but where are the prayers? Shall I tell you plainly why the prayers are wanting? It is to the prayers of the righteous that God's ears are open. We cannot make up our minds to take the path of righteousness: and therefore we have nothing to say to God. But whether we choose to avail ourselves of God's merciful kindness or no, his promise is still the same: his ears are still open to the prayers of the righteous: his eye is still upon those who fear him, and put their trust in his mercy.

Thus was it, as we have seen, when God preserved St Paul from being hurt by the venomous serpent. Thus had it been just before, when God preserved him and the crew of his vessel from perishing by shipwreck. The eye of the Lord was upon him, to deliver his soul from death. In like manner do those who go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters, still see the works of the Lord, and the wonders of his hand. I mention seafaring men, because they are brought to look danger and death in the face much oftener than we are. But we landsmen have our full share also, though it may not be so evident a share, in God's merciful protection. Few,

I should think, can have lived to my age, without having reason to say from their own experience, that God is better than he promised to be, and that his ears are open to the prayers, not of the righteous only, but likewise of the unrighteous, when in the hour of danger they cry to him for deliverance, and promise to forsake their sins.

But you may tell me, that some of the righteous die early, and so, that God's eye cannot have been upon them, to deliver their souls from death. The plain answer to such remarks is, that God knows what is best on the whole for every one; and we may trust his mercy for determining what is best for those that love him.

> Whether early called to bliss
> They in youth shall find their rest,
> Or armed in their station wait
> Till their Lord is at the gate,—

whichever the case may be, God's way of dealing with those that fear him, and trust in his mercy, is to deliver their soul from death, until they have visibly ripened for an eternity of enjoyment. He delivers them from temporal evils; he delivers them from that temporal death, which kills the body, until the seeds of eternal life have grown up and come to ear within them. In truth there is nothing worthy of being called death, that can

befall the children of God. The death we ought to dread,—the death against which the Bible warns us,—is not that sleeping death, which meets our eyes at every turn, but that second waking death, which hereafter shall overtake the wicked. And from this God ever preserves and delivers the souls of his servants. Yet this, which is the only fearful death, is the only death you do not fear. Why? Because you cannot see it. Such poor slaves of the senses are we, that what we see is terrible to us, for all its stillness; whereas what we do not see we are careless of, though the Son of God has told us it is fearful. Could you see it, —could you dream of it,—the worm, the fire, the body's pangs, the soul's torture, the feeling of guilt, the feeling of shame, the feeling of despair, —could you see these things, how would you shudder at them! Are they the less fearful, because you cannot see them? "Blessed are they," our Lord tells us, "who have not seen, and yet have believed."

To turn however to St Paul at Melita: the second point, to which I would call your attention in the account of St Paul's danger and escape, is the impression which the sight made on the poor ignorant islanders. When they saw the viper fasten on him, they thought it must be a judgement; when they saw him escape, they took him

for a god. Now in those poor untaught people such fancies might be excusable. But would they be so in us? Surely not; for we have the means of knowing better. We have read, how, when the disciples (John ix.) asked our Saviour concerning the blind man, saying, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents? that he was born blind;" Jesus answered, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." So again have we read, how, when the people came to Christ, and "told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, Jesus said to them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?" These words of our Saviour's should be enough to keep us from rash uncharitable thoughts about our neighbours, as if, because some affliction has befallen them, God has sent it as a judgement for their sins. But do they keep us from such thoughts? Are not many of us apt to think and say, when some accident or misfortune befalls a person whom we chance to dislike, "It is a judgement on him."

I do not mean to deny, that God does sometimes, even in this life, send a judgement upon evil doers. I believe he does. But I know from very many passages of Scripture, that he also sends trials and afflictions to those whom he loves the best. Therefore worldly troubles, worldly accidents, worldly crosses can be no certain proof of God's anger. The Bible teaches on the contrary, that they are often proofs of his love. Who then, when he sees his brother in any trouble, shall dare pronounce that it is a judgement? If any of you at any time feel disposed to think so uncharitably of a neighbour, call to mind the island of Melita, how the people there thought St Paul a murderer, because a viper fastened on his hand: and let the remembrance of their error keep you from falling into a like one.

But perhaps some will say, if earthly misfortunes are sometimes trials, and sometimes judgements, how shall we know when they are the one, and when the other? I answer, so far as your neighbour is concerned, you hardly ever will know. Nor is it needful that you should. For what have you to do with your neighbour's misdeeds, that you should be curious about him? To his own master he standeth or falleth. When St Peter asked our Saviour, after his resurrection, what was to happen to St John, Jesus answered, "What is

that to thee? follow thou me." Thus, if any of you were to enquire curiously, "Is such a sickness, or such a loss, or such an accident sent on a neighbour as a judgement?" the proper answer would be, "What is that to thee? What business is that of thine? Follow thou Christ: look to thine own ways, without thinking about thy neighbour: lest thou bring down condemnation on thine own head."

Now and then indeed instances do occur where the sin and the punishment are closely linked together; as for instance, when a man falls down dead in a fit of drunkenness. In such cases we are justified in saying, This has God done: for we cannot help seeing that it is his work. But the general and safe and christian rule is, to speak and think of the afflictions and misfortunes of our neighbours, as though they were merely trials. In one case alone it is otherwise: when the misfortune happens to ourselves. Then we shall do well to say within ourselves, "This is sent to punish me for such an evil practice, or to wean me from such a wrong habit;" or, "This is a just judgement on me for my many grievous sins." You may all say this of yourselves; because you ought to try yourselves. But you may not speak thus of your neighbours; because you have no right or authority to judge them. As regards them the rule is clear: "Judge not."

Such is the improvement we may draw from the first error of the barbarous people, in fancying that St Paul was a murderer, because a viper fastened on his hand. As for their other error, in fancying him a god, because he escaped without hurt, it is one we are much less likely to fall into. Few are given to thinking too well of their neighbours, in comparison of those who think ill of them. Still we may glean a lesson even from that. For there is a glare about worldly success, which is very apt to dazzle our eyes. When we see a man rising in the world, thriving in business, successful in his speculations,—if he be a man out of our own line, who does not come into competition with us, so as to make us jealous of him,—we are too apt to form a foolishly high opinion of his merits. We are apt to say within ourselves, "What a wonderful man this must be, to rise so rapidly!" forgetting that dust and straw and feathers, things with neither weight nor value in them, rise the soonest and the easiest. In like manner it is not the truly great and good man, generally speaking, who rises the most rapidly into wealth and notice. A man may be sharp, active, quick, dexterous, cunning; he may be ever on the watch for opportunities to push his fortunes: a man of this kind can hardly fail of getting on in the world. Yet with all this, he may not have a grain of real great-

ness about him. He may be all I have described, and yet have no greatness of heart, no greatness of mind, no greatness of soul. He may be utterly without sympathy and fellow-feeling for others; he may be utterly devoid of all true wisdom; he may be without piety, and without charity, without love, that is, either for God or man. Yet though the prosperous man of the world may easily be a very selfish irreligious creature, we never stop to consider his real worth. If he is a clever fellow, and has risen in life, that is enough for us: we look up to him with admiration, as though he must be something wonderful. Thus the cutting words of the Psalmist are accomplished even at this day: "So long as thou doest well to thyself, men will speak well of thee." What is this, but repeating the error of the people of Melita, in fancying that because St Paul had shaken off the viper, he must be a god?

But if we are often dazzled by the worldly success of others, truly we are apt to have our heads quite turned, when the success happens to ourselves. Here is no jealousy to open our eyes: for who is jealous of himself? Here is no impartiality? for who is impartial toward himself? Here is nothing to sober us, nothing to check the drunkenness of conceit in us from rising even to madness: so that men may even grow wild

enough to fancy that they are sitting on the throne of heaven, and can order all things at their will. These words are not too strong: we read of more than one of the Roman emperors who insisted on being worshipt as a god. Without going so far back, our own times have shewn us, in the great enemy of England, a man who was able to conquer almost everything, except himself, and whose head was able to bear almost everything, except his own fortune. Our heads indeed will never be tried as his was. But a little elevation might be fatal to us, nay, would be so, if we did not guard against it. One man may be intoxicated with a pint, as much as another with half a gallon. It is the same with the cup of fortune. A little sip of it might be enough to endanger the soberminded-ness of persons in our humble station, and to fill us with idle dreams of our own abilities and importance. Let us all beware then of conceit, brethren: let us beware of valuing ourselves on our success in life: let us beware of thinking that our house is built upon a rock, and that we are safe from worldly harm. If at any time God sends us any disappointment, let us humble ourselves before him, and kiss the rod, and look upon it as a call to be more soberminded. Else we may fall into that most desperate, but not uncommon sin, the setting up an idol of ourselves in our hearts, and becoming our own worshipers.

The last point which I would have you observe in this story of St Paul's escape from the viper, is the spiritual lesson which we may draw from it. Did he shake off the venomous serpent which had fastened on him, because he was a true disciple of Jesus Christ? So shall ye too, if ye are his true disciples, be enabled to shake off the spiritual serpent, who will undoubtedly try to fasten upon you. *Try* to fasten, did I say? Has he not fastened on you already? Is he not already at the heart of some of you, in the shape of a besetting sin, poisoning your heart, and trying to kill your soul, which Christ designed should live for ever? If he be, shake him off, the tempter, shake him off into his native fire.

But here let me give you one or two cautions, very needful to be observed. Did the viper fasten on Paul, while he was engaged in a useful and servile work? We may learn from this, that, however humble and useful our walk in life may be, it will still have its own temptations. Every business has its own temptations; every employment has its own temptations; every rank in life has its own temptations. We may find the serpent everywhere: he will be sure to fasten on us, if we do not watch against him: and he will keep his hold, and kill us, if we do not pray to God to deliver us from him. Watch then always:

pray without ceasing: and the moment you feel the temptation creeping upon you, do as St Paul did; shake it off; shake it out of your thoughts and wishes.

For this is the next caution I wish to give you, to do as St Paul did. He did not play with the venomous creature: he did not bring it close to him, and cherish it, and place it next his heart: he shook it off. So must we do with the spiritual serpent who is thirsting for our heart's blood. We must not dally with his temptations, and let them fasten on our thoughts, lest our minds get poisoned by them. We must shake them off at once. Far less should we go to seek the serpent in his nest, by putting ourselves in the way of being tempted. It is true, there is a prophecy in Isaiah, that in the reign of Christ the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. And so they shall. But are we, my brethren, weaned children, in the spiritual and scriptural sense of the words? A time will doubtless come,—God hasten it!—when Christ's kingdom shall be fully established, when the Serpent's fangs shall be drawn, and his power of tempting taken from him, when men shall become like weaned children, weaned from their original wickedness, and free from guile and malice. That time, the time of peace, we know will doubt-

less come. It will come with the new heavens the new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousn But alas! it is not come yet. The war betwe the disciples of Christ and the seed of the Serpe. is still raging. Therefore if we, who are not chi dren now, put ourselves in the Serpent's way, we tempt God to leave us to ourselves: and we shall have nobody but ourselves to blame, if God allows the Serpent to fasten on us, and to wound us with his deadly sting. Do then as St Paul did. Keep out of the Serpent's way: and if he fastens upon you, shake him off, with an earnest prayer to God that he will preserve you from his spiritual sting, even as he preserved St Paul from the viper.

But some will say perhaps, "This caution comes too late. I have allowed the Serpent to fasten on me already. I have cherished him: I have listened to his bewitching voice. He has led me into sin. I feel his poison in my soul." What can be said to this man? Is there no hope for him? I fear there is no hope for him out of the passage I have been preaching on. But there is another very striking passage of Scripture, which entitles even this man, even this poor wounded poisoned sinner, to hope. The passage I am referring to is in the third chapter of St John's Gospel, where our Saviour says to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,

even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That is to say, as Moses, "when the Israelites were bit by fiery serpents, so that much people of Israel died, was commanded by God to make a fiery serpent, and to set it upon a pole," and as God declared "that every one who was bitten, when he looked upon it, should live" (Numbers xxi. 8); in like manner was the Son of man lifted up on the cross for the healing of all who are bitten by the fiery serpents of sin. It is only by looking at Christ upon the cross, that the sinner can hope to recover from the bite of the old Serpent. But he must look on him as the Israelites looked, feeling the burning pain of their wounds, and yearning to be healed of them. He must fix his eyes, or rather he must fix his heart, on Christ upon the cross. So look ye then, and live.

SERMON XXVII.

TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

ISAIAH lxi. 3.

Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord.

EVERY one who reads his Bible, and minds what he reads, must know that it is a very common thing with the sacred writers to compare the growth of religion in man's heart with the growth of trees and plants. To go no farther than that part of the Old Testament which is oftenest read in church, —the book of Psalms,—hear how David speaks in the first Psalm. "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord. He shall be like a tree planted by the water-side, that will bring forth his fruit in due season. His leaf also shall not wither." Again in the 92nd Psalm we read: "The righteous shall flourish like a palm-tree, and shall spread abroad like a cedar in Lebanon. Such as are planted in the house of the Lord,

l flourish in the courts of the house of our J. They also shall bring forth more fruit in ir age, and shall be fat and well-liking." In ıe New Testament, I scarce need remind you, ɔoth John the Baptist and our Saviour make use of nearly the same image, comparing good men to good trees, and evil men to corrupt or rotten trees.

Now in what are men like trees? In what does the likeness between the spiritual and the vegetable life lie? For unless there be some such strong and striking likeness, the passages I have quoted are words with little more than a shadow of meaning. Why, in a word, are God's people called in the text, "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord?"

For you must not fancy, as some may be apt to do, that the sacred writers use images of this kind merely for the sake of ornament, from a fondness for sticking flowers here and there in their pages. These images, if we take them rightly, are so many short parables: they are brought in to rouse our attention, to awaken our fancy, to set us a thinking, and to fix the truth more deeply in our memories by their sharp and pointed manner of putting it. You know how much more easily children are taught a thing by the help of pictures, than by mere naked words. This is just the way

God takes to teach his children in the Bible. When he compares the wicked to grass, which to-day is green, and to-morrow is withered,—when he compares the righteous to a flourishing and deep-rooted tree,— he speaks pictures to us.

Here let me point out to you the great advantage which country-people in this respect have over others, toward the understanding of God's word. The images, or, as I just now called them, the pictures in the Bible are almost all taken from country matters. How should a person who has lived all his life in a town, and never seen a sheep sheared,—how should such a person feel the force of that beautiful passage in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, where our Lord's behaviour before Pilate is compared to a sheep in the shearer's hands? Town-people may understand that the sheep is dumb, and that our Saviour was dumb too, notwithstanding all the insults cast upon him. Thus much they certainly may understand, because the prophet says so. But they cannot have the same strong and lively sense of the whole scene, which they might have gained by seeing a sheep sheared. What is true of sheep-shearing is equally true of the other country occupations and sights so often referred to in the Bible. Images and pictures taken from such things ought to come home with more power to your

minds than they can to the minds of town-people. So that, if the Bible be the poor man's book, it is especially the book of those who plough, and reap, and tend flocks,—of those who have watched the growth of plants, and daily see the sun rise and set, and are led to mark the clouds as they journey across the sky. These are the sights in the midst of which you have grown up: and these are the very images which the Bible is wont to use for the sake of giving us a sense of spiritual things. Instead therefore of complaining that you are unlearned, and making your want of knowledge an excuse, as too many do, for not studying their Bible, you should rather say to yourselves, "God, though he has withheld many advantages and opportunities from me, has given me one advantage, and that a great one: he has cast my lot in the country; so that from my childhood upward I have been accustomed to see many of the things which the Bible speaks of the oftenest. Let me make the more use of this advantage, because it is my only one. Let me strive to find out and keep in mind the meaning of the images and pictures in God's book. When I see a flock of sheep, let me think of the good Shepherd. When I see a man ploughing, let me remember the sufferings of my Saviour, how "the ploughers ploughed upon his back, and made long furrows" (Psalm cxxix. 3).

In this way let me try to make all I see, and all I do, minister to the understanding of the word of God; praying earnestly to God that he will shew me the true spiritual meaning of his pictures, and beseeching him to give me grace, that, the more I know of his grace, and of his plan for our salvation, the more thankful I may be for it,—the more I know of his law, the more anxious I may be to keep it."

Having thus shewn you the purposes intended to be answered by these images and pictures, which the Bible so often uses, I shall go back to the picture set before us in the text: why are God's people called "trees of righteousness?"

In the first place they are so called for the reason given in the text, because they are "the planting of the Lord." Godliness is not a thing which any craft of man can fashion. A man can no more make himself godly, than he can make a tree, or so much as the seed of a tree. If he becomes so, it must be the work of God. It was the word of God, that in the beginning made "the earth bring forth the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself:" and it is from the seeds of the forests which the earth brought forth in the days when God made heaven and earth,—it is from the seeds of those first and earliest trees, that all other trees have arisen. Some of these have sown themselves,

as it were. They have sprung up, and grown, and come to their full stature, without any help from man. Others have been sown by man: and these too have grown up in time to be trees, and have flourished, and been strong and beautiful. So is it with the trees of righteousness. When God gave his blessed word to man, he gave it to be full of seeds. For so it is written: "The seed is the word of God." If this seed be duly sown in the heart,—it matters not by what means,—let it only be sown; and, if it be neither choked by thorns, nor burnt up by the heat, nor killed by the frost, the plant thus sown, if God watches over it and prospers it, will grow up to be a tree of righteousness.

It matters not, I say, by what means the word is sown. The means are manifold: for the Lord worketh diversely. Sometimes the seed is sown in early childhood by godly parents: and happy is it for those children in whom the seed is thus sown. Sometimes it is self-sown, as it were, while we are reading or listening to the Scriptures. Sometimes it is sown by what may justly be called an act of more special providence; as when a passage in a book, taken up perhaps for amusement, finds its way to our heart, and drops some good seed into it. But oftener it is sown by the voice of the preacher, or by the counsel of some

true friend. Here is a great variety of methods, by every one of which, there can be no doubt, the seeds of divine truth have been planted over and over again, and to such good purpose as to grow up into trees of righteousness.

But some may ask,—if the seed can be sown by godly parents, and by christian ministers, how can it be said of such trees, that they are the Lord's planting? I answer in the words of St Paul: "I have planted; Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth; but God, that giveth the increase" (1 Cor. iii. 6, 7). In every case the trees of righteousness must be of God's planting. But God is pleased, as we have seen, to plant in divers ways,—sometimes by an act of special providence to awaken us to a sense of his ever-watchful power,—at other times, and more frequently, by the preaching and teaching of the ministers whom he has set to take care of his people. Nevertheless, even though it were Paul himself that planted, the work would still be God's; to whom alone be therefore ascribed the glory of our merciful planting unto life. Even when God is pleased to honour his servants, by making them his instruments in planting, they can only at the utmost sow seeds, the growth of which must be from God.

Growth then is a second point of likeness between trees and godliness; which makes it proper to call the righteous "trees of righteousness." Without the sun and air and rain, where would be the growth of the tree? Without the light and the purifying breath and the dew of God's holy Spirit, where would be the growth of the Christian? In this point above all does man feel his utter weakness. He can plant indeed after a fashion, or try to plant: he can put the seed into the ground and into the mind: he can bind line upon line, and precept upon precept: but can he make the seed grow? Will the line of duty keep a man straight? will the precept curb even his outward conduct? much more will it tame and govern his heart? Alas! these are things far beyond the power of human teaching. It is God, and God alone, who giveth the growth and increase.

But if this be so, if the growth and increase be thus entirely the gift of God, what is left for man to do toward working out his salvation? I answer, it is left for man to pray. Here we have a strong motive for hearty prayer: for God has promised his Spirit to them that ask him. Do any of you wish for the help of that Spirit, without which you cannot grow up into trees of righteousness? Ask for it, and you shall have it. God is not a grudg-

ing giver: he delights to give bountifully. See how he deals with the plants of the field. How rarely does he withhold his rain from them! And shall he not much more pour out the influences of his Spirit upon those souls of immortal birth, that yearn to be reunited with him in Christ? Shall he not, when he has promised so to do? Bear in mind however: the promise is only to them that ask him. If any one neglects to ask heartily and pressingly, the promise reaches not to him.

Nor is prayer the only thing left us to do. The Bible, though it teaches us to be humble-minded, is no encourager of sloth. While it would have us on the one hand look to God for everything like children who know that their food and clothing are the gifts of a good and loving father; on the other hand it would have us work out our salvation as carefully and diligently as if every thing depended on ourselves. And do we not deal thus in worldly matters? Every one knows that without rain the trees will not grow, that without sun the fruits will not ripen. Every one knows too that he cannot make the rain fall, or the sun shine, but that both the rain and the sunshine are the gifts of God most high. Yet who was ever hindered by knowing this from doing his best to improve his orchard, trusting in God to bless his labours! So it is with the spiritual orchard. It

needs rain and sunshine: therefore we must pray for the rain and sunshine from above. But it also needs to be manured; therefore we must seek manure for it, in the constant study of God's word, and in diligent attendance on the ordinances of his Church. Nor is it enough to enrich the ground, unless we also weed it: in like manner we must regularly weed our hearts by searching self-examination. He who is the most careful thus to weed and manure his heart, will be the first to feel his need of God's help: and he who prays for that help the most earnestly, will be the likeliest to employ the grace granted him to the purifying and strengthening of his soul. If he does so employ it, he will grow: he will make shoots upward. Christian graces will sprout from the trunk of such a tree one after another.

A third likeness between the spiritual and the natural tree is, that their growth is by degrees. A forest-tree does not spring up in a day, or in a month, or in a year. Nor do the trees of righteousness: they too want time to grow. What madness then must it be in any one to put off sowing and fostering the good seed in his heart, until the soil becomes hardened by neglect and age, and till no time, naturally speaking, is left him for the growth of holiness! Can such persons ever hope to grow up into trees of righteousness? trees! when they

are to be planted in extreme old age . . perhaps not till death has already begun to lay his hand upon them. Gourds, and not trees of righteousness, would be a fitter name for them: for the suddenness of such a would-be growth reminds one of the gourd of the prophet Jonah. But the righteousness which is to spring up like Jonah's gourd, will it not, even if it does spring up, perish also like Jonah's gourd? You may remember that God prepared a worm: and the worm smote the gourd, that it withered. What if this be the woful lot prepared for the gourds of righteousness! Plant your tree in good time then, that you may be trees, and not gourds, even such trees as David speaks of, trees whose increase of fruit keeps pace with the increase of their years.

The next, and perhaps the most remarkable point of likeness between the spiritual and vegetable life is the sap which flows through a healthy tree, and makes it thrive and grow. Thus is it with the trees of the forest; and thus it likewise is with the trees of righteousness. "The trees of the Lord (we read) are full of sap." In other words, they are full of christian feeling, which is the food and nourishment of christian practice. You can no more have the fruits of holiness, without the life-blood of christian love, than you can have a tree thriving and growing without sap.

Godliness, as I have already said, is not a piece of handiwork, but a growth; and there can be no growth without life. Look then, brethren, to your christian life: look to your feelings and principles: look to your hearts; for out of them are the issues of life. Most of you must remember the passage in which our Saviour, after comparing himself to the vine, and his disciples to the branches, goes on thus: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. Without me ye can do nothing: but he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (John xv. 4,5). Now what is meant by our abiding in Christ? which Christ himself thus declares we must, before we can bear much fruit. Thus much, I think, must be clear from the words, taken in their soberest sense, that no outward conformity, no calling one self a Christian, no cold attendance on the ceremonies of religion, can be called abiding in Christ. There must be a riddance of that pride and self-will, which cut a man off from God. We must ask of God to unite our hearts to himself, to purify our will, so that it may be one with his will, and to give us the power of making him the object of our daily thoughts, and receiving him into our inmost affections. This is the only union with God which men can strive after or aim at. Call to mind our

Saviour's parting words: "Abide in me, and I in you." Abide in Christ, to use his own comparison, as closely as a branch abides in the parent tree. Take his will to be your will; take his affections to be your affections; take his thoughts, as far as possible, to be your thoughts. Draw the nourishment of your souls from him. Pray that the sap of his love may flow through your hearts, and give you spiritual life and strength and vigour to obey and serve God in spirit and in truth. For this is the end the sap is to answer. If it does not answer this end, we might as well be without it. "Herein is your Father glorified, (says Christ,) that ye bear much fruit." "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit." Here is a sure test to try whether our hearts are right toward God. Are we bearing much fruit? Because, unless we are, the sap of christian feeling and christian principle cannot be flowing through us. The proof of the sap is the healthiness of the tree: the proof of christian love is the holiness of christian practice. If our hearts are christian, our thoughts and tempers and daily behaviour will all be christian. We shall be Christians not in word only, but in deed.

The last points to which I mean to call your attention, are the deep root and tall stem of

the tree. The finest trees are rooted deep in earth, and point in their uprightness to heaven. So too must we have our root of faith strong in Christ: so our hearts must look, our minds must turn, our souls must rise toward heaven. If you cut a tree off from its root, it dies: so does righteousness, if severed from faith. But if the root be strong and healthy, it will bear and feed a healthy and strong tree: so must faith, if healthy and strong, bear and feed a life of righteousness. As the stem however does not stand by its own strength, but by the strength of the root, so neither can righteousness stand by itself: if it stands at all, it must stand by faith.

Such are the trees of righteousness which the prophet speaks of in the text. Their planting is from God's word; their growth is from God's Spirit; their root is faith; their sap is love; they are full of the fruits of holiness; they mount far above the earth in their beautiful uprightness: they grow and point toward God. And shall they after all die? Verily I say to you, not one of them shall die. The Psalmist compares them to the straight palm and the strong cedar, the noblest and most imperishable of trees. And straight indeed are the truly righteous, in all their plans and all their ways, straight as the purest truth and the most self-denying honesty can make them;

noble too, from having their hearts lifted so high above the meanness which earth and the things of earth are wont to breed. As for being imperishable, how can they perish? they, whom the Father loves, for whom the Son has died, whose sap is the Spirit of immortality. They shall be immortal as the Spirit who lives in them. They must be cut down indeed by death: but it will only be to spring up again, straighter, purer, higher, fuller of love, fuller of holiness, perfected through God's mercy, to be brought into his immediate presence. Christ shall bring them to his Father, and say to him, "Behold, these are the trees which thou hast given me of thy planting. I have watered them with my blood: I have nourished them with my spirit. They took root, and gathered strength, and bore fruit to thy glory, even in the barren soil of a corrupt world. Grant, O Father, for thy word's sake, and for thy mercy's sake, that they may flourish in the courts of thy house." Would it delight you, brethren, to have words like these spoken of you? Do your hearts burn within you at the thought of being the objects of such favour, the heirs of such glory, the enjoyers of such heavenly happiness? If you do desire all this, be diligent to do your part. Pray for that Spirit which must feed your life: watch the seed which God has planted: turn to God in early

youth, that you may have time to go on from strength to strength. Offer God a freewill-offering of the best and brightest of your days: weed the heart; prune the heart; that your life may be a life of righteousness.

Such as I have described, and no other, were the beautiful trees, wherewith Solomon built and adorned his glorious temple. Such, and no other, must be the christian souls, wherewith a greater than Solomon will build his spiritual Church, and adorn the very courts of God. As for the misshapen and crooked and stunted tree, as for the fruit-tree which refuses to bear fruit, as for the tree of whatever kind that is dead and sapless at heart,—against that tree the sentence is gone out: it was uttered by Christ's own mouth; and I, as Christ's ambassador, entreat you all to lay it to heart. The sentence against the barren, the unimprovable tree is—Cut it down.

SERMON XXVIII.

HARVEST LESSONS.

PROVERBS x. 5.

He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.

IN my last sermon I set before you, how the Bible is wont to speak of spiritual truths in images and figures taken from country life: and I advised you to bear this in mind, so that, whether you ploughed or sowed, whether you saw the sun rise or set, you might turn whatever you do, and whatever you see, into food and matter for pious thought. Try, (such was my advice to you,) to find a spiritual meaning in all your daily work. It should be much easier for you to do so, than for people born and bred in towns: because the Bible says comparatively little about town matters, while it speaks often and largely about country matters. Look out then for the images and pictures which

the Bible takes from country objects: store them up in your minds: and when at any time you meet with one of those objects, say within yourselves, "This should remind me of such a spiritual truth." For instance, sheepshearing should remind you of the innocent and patient Jesus, the Lamb of God; how, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." In the same way the hardness of the ground in a dry season, and the parched and withered state of all the herbage, should remind you of our great need of divine grace: which is such, that, unless God sends the rain of his Spirit on our hearts, they too will be dry and hard, and as barren as the barest common.

If you would thus accustom yourselves, with the help of Scripture, to seek for God and Christ in everything you do and see,—if you would get the habit of looking on earthly things as so many finger-posts and steps to guide and raise you to the knowledge and thought of spiritual things,—it is wonderful what improvement you would find. The more you tried to do this, and the more you prayed to God to enable you to do it, the more delightful the practice would become to you. You would feel yourselves brought evermore nearer to

God in mind and thought. You would perceive new meanings in things. You would learn to see God everywhere. All your daily business would be hallowed to you; because God, or his Son, or his Spirit, his goodness to you, and your duty to him, would be traceable in everything you do. In a word, you would have God always before you; and thus your eyes would be open to discern the wondrous things of his law.

But example, they say, is better than precept: so I mean to give you an example of the way in which your daily business may be made to minister to the good of your souls. You have lately been busy about your harvest; and it is of harvest that I am going to speak to you. Now every attentive reader of the New Testament, as soon as he hears the word harvest, will be reminded of the harvest which our Saviour speaks of in the parable of the tares. You may remember that, when the disciples asked him to shew them the meaning of that parable, he said: "The harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send forth his angels; and they shall gather out them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire" (Matt. xiii. 39—42). Now if, when you have gone out to your

daily task of reaping the corn which God has given us, you had kept these words of our Saviour's well in mind;—if, every day that you left your homes to reap, or to overlook your reapers, you had said within yourselves, "This present harvest is certainly of great importance to my worldly interests; but it is nothing in comparison of the harvest which is to come: that is the harvest to look forward to: that is the harvest to prepare for. God grant me his grace that during this present harvest I may behave as his child and servant, that I may not fall into condemnation at that dreadful harvest, when angels are to be the reapers, and sinners are to be treated like so many hurtful weeds, which are fit for nothing but to be burnt:" I put it to each of you, my brethren, whether it would not have been profitable to your souls, if you had accustomed yourselves through the present harvest never to begin your morning's work without some such seasonable thoughts. Would not such improper talk have been stopt by it, which has gone on not only among the men; but I fear I must add, among the women also? Would not your joy, as you brought the sheaves home, have been purer and gentler, and fuller of thankfulness to the Lord who giveth the increase? In a word, would not this have been a holier harvest to every one of you, if the thought of that last

harvest, which our Saviour speaks of, had been continually before your minds?

But though this harvest at the end of the world, with the burning of the tares and chaff, and the gathering of the good sheaves into God's barn, which we are told shall then take place,—though these are doubtless the first spiritual truths which a reader of his Bible will think of when he is going to harvest-work, yet these are not the only spiritual lessons to be drawn from the time of harvest. There are other very good and useful practical lessons to be drawn from that time besides. Some of these practical lessons I shall now point out to you, in speaking on the words which I have chosen for my text: "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he that sleepeth in harvest causeth shame."

Taking these words in their literal and worldly sense, and applying them simply to the corn-harvest, their meaning and truth are plain enough. Everybody will understand, that a father, who is old and past work, must be pleased to have a son on his farm so careful and active, as to watch his opportunities, and put forth all his strength just at the right time for housing the crop in the best condition. Such a son would be a pleasure to any father. On the other hand, a son who was the reverse of this, a son who slept, that is, who loi-

tered and idled away his time in harvest, a son who wasted a fine day in going to a wake or merrymaking, instead of loading and hurrying on the waggons in his father's field,—such a son would bring shame on himself and on his family, when, owing to his sloth and idleness, the crop was left out too long, and so got damaged by a change of weather.

The truth of all this is plain: and if there had been nothing deeper than this in the proverb, I should never have taken it for a text. It might have been a verse for lads to get by heart; but it would not have been a verse to preach on. In the Bible however we may be sure that the marks of some spiritual truth, the seeds of some practical instruction, lie in every nook and corner. Let us pierce then through this first and most literal meaning of the text. Let us try to get to the under soil, and see what lesson the words, when spiritually interpreted, will give us.

"He that gathereth in summer is a wise son." Summer, you know, is the right season for gathering in the harvest. To say then that it is wise to gather in summer, is only saying in other words, that a wise man will make the most of his opportunities, and will gather whatever he has to gather at the best and fittest season. Now is not this a practical lesson? a lesson too which many

need? Is it not a practical lesson for children, as soon as they begin to learn? Their summer, so far as learning is concerned, is the time that they spend at school. That time is just as much the season for them to learn in, as the month of August is the season for their fathers to reap in. The same God, who appointed the one season, has equally appointed the other. It is as much his will that children should learn at school, as that reapers should reap in summer. Let every child then, who goes to school, draw this lesson from the text. Let him say to himself, "This is the time for me to lay up a little store of knowledge. It is the time God has given me on purpose that I may learn to read his word. It is the time he has given me to learn prayers and hymns. If I miss this opportunity, perhaps I may never have another. Let me not throw it away then. Let me not be like the fool who sleeps in harvest, or I shall come to great shame."

Again, is it not a practical lesson for those who are in the prime and strength of life? These are in the summer of their days, so far as practice is concerned. The seeds of the good principles which were sown in them during their childhood should now be springing up in them, and ripening, and bearing fruit. You have all had opportunities of learning the great outlines of your duty to God

and man. None of you can be ignorant that you have a God who made you, a Redeemer who died for you, a Holy Spirit who will make you holy, if you will receive him into your hearts, and submit to his guidance. None of you can be ignorant that sin is exceedingly hateful in God's sight, that you are by nature prone to sin, that you have a continual need of God's help, to keep you from falling into some sin or other, and that this help must be sought for by diligent and hearty prayer. Nor can any of you be ignorant of the greatness of your debt to God: that you owe him everything you have: that every good thing you have enjoyed from the moment of your birth till now, every good thing you can hope to enjoy in this world or the next,—all is a gift, a free gift to you from God. On the other hand you cannot be ignorant what God requires from you in return for all his goodness; that he requires everything, —all your love, all your trust, all your fear, all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul. Or, to say the same thing more plainly by coming down to particulars, you cannot be ignorant that God requires you to pray to him, to praise him, to honour his name, his day, his word, to take every opportunity of learning his will, and to do all this with a true heart, out of love and thankfulness to him, and to his blessed Son who

redeemed us with his blood. So too with regard to your duties to your fellow men, you must all know that God requires you to speak the truth every one to his neighbour, to set a guard upon your mouths, to be careful that no untrue, or unholy, or impure, or violent, or bitter words, issue from your lips; that he requires you to be perfectly honest and upright in all your dealings, temperate in your food, plain and modest in your dress, sober, quiet, and self-denying in your amusements; that he requires you to be perfectly pure and chaste, not only by abstaining from adultery and fornication, and the like heathenish and open sins, but by keeping a watch over your very thoughts, and endeavouring to be pure in heart. Lastly, you must all be aware that God requires you to be peaceable, gentle, yielding, forgiving, humble, kind to all, mild and affable to those below you, respectful to those above you, faithful and active in all your trusts and duties, doing these and every other good thing, not from any worldly or selfish motive, but as unto God, out of love to him, and because he commands you so to do. Thus much of your duty, I say, you must all know: at least if you do not, (I am speaking of those who are arrived at manhood,) if after living from your birth in a christian land, with a church open to you Sunday after Sunday,

you are still ignorant of these things, the fault must needs be your own.

Well! "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them:" and the time for doing them is *now*, now that you are in the summer of life. You have learnt these great principles and rules of your duty to God and man, not for the sake of laying them up in your memories, nor to enable you to say that you know them. You were planted with them in your childhood, that in your riper age you might bring forth much fruit to the glory of God. And the time for bringing forth that fruit, if you are wise sons, wise sons of God, and faithful brethren of Christ,—I repeat it, the time is now. Do not sleep in this your spiritual harvest of duty to God and man. If you are far gone in manhood, and have slept hitherto, call to mind St Paul's words, that now it is high time for you to awake out of that sleep (Rom. xiii. 11). If you are just entering into manhood, beware of falling into sleep. Remember that God requires from us the first-fruits of our days, just as he required from the children of Israel the first-fruits of their corn and oil. In every case avoid the too common snare of putting off the beginning of a christian life to a more convenient season. A more convenient season! What would you say of the farmer, who, when his wheat was

ripe on the ground, and the sun was shining in its summer strength, instead of putting the sickle to the corn, began to make excuses, and say: "No, it is rather hot to-day; and it may rain next week: and there is a wedding I wish to go to at the other end of the county. I will put off my harvest for a month or so. The season then will be more convenient to me." If you would count such talk folly and madness in a farmer, what must it be in you? Surely "the life is more than meat." If it would be madness to put off the harvest of the bread that perishes, how worse than madness must it be to put off the harvest of holiness and obedience!

Again, another practical application of the text may be made to the way of keeping Sunday. Sunday is to the rest of the week in spirituals, what summer is to the rest of the year in temporals. It is the chief time for gathering knowledge to last you through the following week, just as summer is the chief season for gathering food to last you through the following twelvemonth. Do you make the most of this weekly summer? Do you, like wise sons, gather instruction by listening to the reader and the preacher? Do you gather fresh stores of grace and strength by diligent and humble attendance on the ordinances of God? Or do you sleep? Surely this question may well be

asked in church. For many do sleep away their Sunday, some at church, and some at home: and many who keep the eyes of their body open, allow the eyes of their mind to close, and are no wiser and no better for all they hear with their ears and repeat with their lips in this place, than if they had not set their foot in it. Verily I must warn you, brethren, such sleepers do indeed cause shame. They are a shame to their minister, whose teaching they refuse to profit by. They are a shame to the Church, which received them when infants into her bosom. They are a disgrace to the Lord and Master, whose name they bear, but whose word they pay no heed to, and whose day they waste in sloth and carelessness.

Such are some of the simplest ways in which the text may be applied to spiritual and practical truths. Such are some of the various harvests which we are called to gather in; the harvest of youth, when we should gather knowledge,—the harvest of manhood, when we should gather holiness,—the harvest of the sabbath, when we should gather spiritual instruction, and meat for our soul's need. At all these seasons and in all these ways it behoves us, my friends, to gather. Do you ask, how much? Why, all we can. Let your harvest then increase, until you yourselves are gathered to the Lord by Jesus Christ in the great

harvest, according to the saying of the Psalmist: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (cxxvi. 6). You see, the Psalmist says, *doubtless* he shall come again. And so it must needs be. He who came once as a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, bringing us the precious seed of God's word, will doubtless return again; but he will return no longer sorrowing. He will have seen of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. He will have collected the fruits of his glorious labours, the souls he has won, the spirits he has purified. So will he come again rejoicing, bringing these his sheaves with him. That you, my brethren, may have a place in that blessed harvest-home, God of his infinite mercy grant!

SERMON XXIX.

GOD'S PATIENCE, AND MAN'S PERVERSENESS.

ROMANS ii. 4, 5.

Despisest thou the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God?

THIS question, I fear, is still as applicable to some in every christian congregation, as it can have been to the Romans when St Paul asked it. Therefore it should be asked in every congregation from time to time. And what occasion can be fitter, what season more suitable for asking it, than when by God's mercy we have just been brought to the close of a year in safety, and are about to step as it were out of the old year into a new one? At such a season it cannot be ill for us,—rather

must it be our duty, to halt awhile and take breath, to look back over the ground we have been crossing the last twelve months, to look forward to the point we should be making for, and thus to find out whether during the last year we have indeed been traveling toward the heavenly Jerusalem, and walking on the road that leads to life. If not, if we have not been walking along that road, and walking too pretty briskly,—if we have been sauntering, or stopping, or sleeping, on our journey,—much more if we have been going backward, like some,—or have broken away from the path, like others, and have lost sight of God and heaven,—great reason shall we have to ask ourselves, why God has continued us so long in life? and what will happen to us, if we go on to the end as negligently, or as slothfully, or as crookedly, or as wrongfully, as we have been going on the last year?

Do not take it for granted, I beseech you, that you have been going on right: look carefully whether you have or not. The road of life is not a turnpike road. It is a path which every one must find out for himself, by the help of such directions as God has given us: and there are so many other paths crossing the true one in all quarters, and the wrong paths are so well beaten, and the true path in places is so faintly marked, so

many persons too are always going the wrong way, and so few are walking straight along the right, that, between the number of paths to puzzle him, and the number of wrong examples to lead him astray, a man, if he does not take continual heed, is in great danger of turning into a wrong path, almost without perceiving it. You know how hard it is for a stranger to find his way over the downs, especially if the evening is dark and foggy. Yet there the man is at liberty to make out the path as well as he can. No one tries to mislead him. But in the paths of life there are always plenty of companions at work to mislead the Christian; to say nothing of his own evil passions and appetites, which all pull him out of the way. One neighbour says to him, "Take this road: it is almost as straight as the other, and much pleasanter." Another says, "Take this road: it is a short cut, and will save you a world of trouble." A third says, "Walk part of the way with us for company's sake: you cannot be far wrong if you keep with us: at worst it is only crossing back into your narrow lonely path if you don't like our way after trying it." A fourth cries to him, "What makes you so particular? Do you fancy you know the road to heaven better than anybody else? We are all going there, we hope, as well as you, though we do not make such a fuss about it." Is it a

wonder, that, with so many bad advisers, and bad examples to lure him astray, with so many wrong paths to puzzle him, with so many evil passions as man has naturally pulling him out of the straight and narrow path,—is it a wonder, I say, that, with all these things to lead them wrong, men should so often go wrong? It is no wonder: nay, were it not that God's word is a lantern to our feet, and a light to our paths,—were it not for the Spirit of God crying to us, "This is the right way," when we turn aside to the right hand or to the left,—we should all of us go wrong always. Even as it is, with all our helps, we have too much cause to cry, We have erred and strayed from the right way like lost sheep, and have gone after a multitude to do evil, and have followed the devices and desires of our own hearts, instead of walking in God's most holy laws.

Why do I remind you of these things, brethren, at the present season? In order to press upon you how necessary it is for us to stop on our journey from time to time, to look well back over the ground we have been treading, and to satisfy ourselves that we are indeed pursuing the road which leads to life. If not, if we have fallen into any evil course, if any sinful practice, any bad passion, any worldly lust has stolen upon us and grown up within us, if we have no more meekness, or kind-

ness, or purity, or honesty, or truth, or holiness, than we had a year ago, then the question in the text should make us tremble. For be sure it is addrest to us. To us, for sinning, and continuing impenitent, and bearing so little fruit, to each of us St Paul says now, as he said formerly to the sinners of his own time: "Despisest thou the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? Art thou ignorant that by thy hardness and impenitent heart thou art treasuring up for thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God?"

In this question there are three things well worth pondering: first, God's reason for sparing our lives, namely, to lead us to repentance; and the cause which moves him to desire us to repent, namely, his goodness: secondly, the return which the sinner, in the hardness and impenitence of his heart, makes to God for his goodness, namely, despising and throwing away the opportunity thus afforded him, an opportunity so precious that St Paul calls it the *riches* of God's goodness and forbearance: thirdly, the fatal end of all this hardness and impenitence, that by it we lay up a treasure of wrath for ourselves against the day of wrath. In other words, the text teaches us three things,—

that God is merciful and would have us repent,—that many men are so hardened and perverse, they will not profit by God's mercy,—and that, if we persist in rejecting God's mercy, we must abide the outpouring of his anger.

In the first place God is merciful, and would have us repent. This is the reason why he spares so many bold offenders. After death the door of penitence is closed: as the tree falls, so it must lie. Therefore he mercifully continues us in life, for the purpose of leading us to repentance,—of leading us, mind, not dragging us. It is by the cords of a man, as the prophet Hosea (xi. 4) calls them, that our heavenly Father would draw us to him. He would bring us nearer to him by our heart-strings. So he sometimes takes hold of one string, and sometimes of another, that by one or more of them he may pull us to him. At one time he tries to win us by mercies, at another to frighten us by judgements. He is for ever teaching us by his dealings toward our neighbours and ourselves, that the truest wisdom is to fear God, that blessings are on the head of the pious and the just, that he who walketh uprightly walketh surely, that God loveth and careth for the righteous. The whole machine of his providence is at work, to prove to us that we can gain nothing by disobeying him. All the time he spares us, his eye and hand

are upon us, to guide us, to loosen us from earth, to gain us over to godliness of living. Does he see us setting up some earthly idol in our hearts? He takes it away, and makes us feel that this world has nothing stable in it. Does he see us indulging in forbidden pleasures? He makes us taste their bitterness and gall. So with regard to every other sin which can ensnare the heart of man, he takes care to order matters in such wise, that we shall often be baffled, that the trouble of pursuit, even when we do succeed, is greater than the thing is worth, and that the end is always weariness and vexation, generally disgust, never perfect, calm, hearty satisfaction. "The wicked eat, but have not enough; while they who fear the Lord are at peace." Moreover while he is thus working on the understanding of the sinner, to convince him that the ways of sin are the ways of folly, God often begins to work on his fears. He lays him low on a bed of sickness, and sends death to look him in the face, and to whisper in his ear, Condemnation! At the same time he carries some passage of Scripture, which speaks of God's mercy and forbearance, and of the death of Christ who died for all, that all might turn to God and live,—some great truth of this kind will God take care to aim right at the trembling sinner's heart, if so be that love and gratitude may move him.

Now if we ask, why God, who is a righteous judge and strong, is also patient, although we are provoking him daily,—if we ask, why he does not pluck his right hand out of his bosom to sweep his enemies clean away,—St Paul tells us in the text. Because his goodness would lead them to repentance. Does it ever fail of this blessed effect? Can God be good and merciful in vain? Alas! many are so hardened and headstrong, that they will not profit by God's mercy. In vain he teaches, in vain he chastens, in vain he calls to them. They despise the riches of his goodness. When I say they despise him, I do not mean that they are mad enough to declare that they despise God, and to set him at defiance. But they do not regard him or his dealings with them: they shut him out of their thoughts: they leave him out of their plans: they go on just as if there was no God, no judgement to come, no place of torment for the impenitent. This practical disregard for their Maker and King in the language of the Bible is despising God. So let none deceive himself by saying, "This cannot apply to me; for I have never meant to despise God." The question is not, what you have meant, but what you have done. Have you ever thought seriously of God's goodness to you in not cutting you off, as he might do any day, in the midst of your

sins? Have you ever considered why he prolongs that life and strength, which you are making so bad a use of? Why does he continue to you the power of speech, instead of striking you dumb for cursing and swearing and using so many bad and filthy words? Why does he continue to you the power of thought, when you so rarely, if ever, think of him? Why in a word, when he sees you sinning so zealously with heart and mind, and eyes and ears, and in short with all your members,—why does he continue to you the full and free enjoyment of all those members and faculties, which you are so ungratefully, so impiously misusing? Have you ever thought of the reason why God has had all this patience with you? that it is to lead you to repentance. If you have never thought of these things, if on the contrary you are saying within yourself, "Oh! I have plenty of time before me; I am young and strong: time enough to think of another world, when I begin to tire of this:"—then to you is this word spoken. Whether you mean it or not, you are verily guilty of despising the goodness and forbearance of your God. Can any guilt well be greater? It is not a small thing that you are despising: no; it is riches, the best riches, the riches of the mercy of the King of heaven. It is easy to see why St Paul calls it riches. He would teach us the excellence of this mercy, which is

so great, that, if we only knew the true value of things, we should fall on our knees, and bless God with all our hearts for sparing us month after month, and year after year, that we may have time and opportunities for repentance.

But what if the opportunities are given in vain? What if the time, which should have been spent in repentance, has been employed in heaping sin upon sin? What if December leave us as far from heaven as January found us, but with a heavier load on our consciences, and a deeper stain on our souls? Then I must set before you the evil end of such a life of sin, the evil end of going on year after year despising the riches of God's goodness and forbearance. The wages of sin is death. The end of rejecting God's mercy must be to abide the fierceness of his anger, in that day when the Son of Man comes in all his Father's glory to execute judgement on the wicked. Against that day, St Paul tells us in the text, hardened and impenitent sinners are treasuring up for themselves wrath. Pray mark the word; for it is a very striking one: a treasure of wrath! As if St Paul had said, "If ye will not profit by the riches of God's mercy, God has riches of another sort in store for you, the riches, the overflowings of his wrath." Let no man be mad enough to say within himself, I will lay up my treasure upon

earth: for we must all lay up treasure in heaven, whether we will or no. We are all laying up treasure there at this moment: if it be not a treasure of holiness, it must be a treasure of wrath. Could our eyes be opened to behold the secrets of the next world, how should we start and tremble at seeing this mountain of wrath and misery and punishment, which we are heaping up against ourselves! The covetous muckworm for instance, who scrapes up penny upon penny, and pound upon pound, by so many base, dishonest, oppressive ways,—how would he shudder to find the treasure he delights in, a treasure, not of money, but of wrath! The drunkard, who wallows in strong drink,—it might rouse even him from his deadly lethargy, could he see every cup of drunkenness swelling a stream of wrath for him. The unclean man, who offends the holy Spirit of God by his adultery, his fornication, his impure thoughts, and filthy words,—what would be his feelings, if he saw the pile of flaming wrath, which his pleasures, as he deems them, are rapidly raising up against him! But so it is, whether we see it or not. We have the apostle's word for it: the joys of sin are joys of wrath; the wages of sin are wages of wrath: the treasures of sin are treasures of wrath, and vengeance, and punishment, and misery, and woe.

Brethren, is it worth our while, for such treasures as these, to slight and throw away the riches of God's mercy, the riches of Christ's prayers, the riches of the graces of the Holy Spirit? These last may be yours, if you will have them. God is not niggardly of his gifts and blessings. He presses his offers of forgiveness upon sinners. He holds out his royal pardon to them, if they will only leave their sins, and come to him, and take it. Remember what he says of himself in the prophet Isaiah (lxv. 2): "I have spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people." Though his people were rebellious, yet he ceased not throughout that day to stretch out his hands to them, and beckon to them So does he beckon to us too: but it is only through the day, the day of grace. If we hearken not to his invitations during that day, the call ceases: the hand which would have led us to repentance, is withdrawn: we are given over, possibly even in this world to a reprobate mind, certainly in the next world to punishment everlasting. Turn then, I beseech you, while the day of grace is still open to you. Let the time past suffice us to have spent in sin; and let us endeavour to redeem the time that still remains to us. Let us bury our ungodliness, our unrighteousness, our transgressions and sins of every kind, in the grave of the departing

year: and with a new year let us begin a new and spiritual life,—a life not merely of human virtue, but of christian holiness and obedience.

For to this we are called. Christ did not give us his perfect example,—he did not preach his divine sermon,—he did not leave us so many promises and warnings, so many beautiful and touching parables, so many lessons of every kind,—he did not purchase for us the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter,—merely to make us what the world calls decent and respectable. The better of the heathens were as good as that, ages before Christ's coming. If we, with all our greater advantages, do not soar much nearer to heaven, Jesus Christ has lived for us and taught us in vain. He came to make us a holy nation, a peculiar people, children of God in heart and spirit. He came not merely to reconcile, but also to reunite us to the Father. Until he has done this for each of us,—until he has raised and lifted us up from common human virtue to godliness,—until he has changed our natural worldly views and motives into spiritual thoughts and heavenly desires,—his work in us is not accomplished. Until he has sown the seeds of this blessed change in us, his work in us is not begun. We may be good heathens, or good Jews, but we cannot be Christians, unless we are Christ's people. And how can we be Christ's

people, unless we have something of Christ's spirit in us? I say, *something* of the same spirit. I do not say that you will ever attain to the fulness of his spirit, though we ought to pray and strive to do so; as St Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God. But I do tell you, that you can and must attain to a portion of Christ's spirit: else you are none of Christ's. We must be golden, as he was golden: and then, though our holiness be no more comparable to his, than the smallest gold coin is comparable to the mines of Ophir, still we are of the same metal, and his riches will make up for our poorness, and he will present us as an offering to our Father and our God. But if we are not of the right metal, we are mere counterfeits; and then what can the name of Christian avail us in the day of judgement? Many a bad sovereign professes to bear the king's image and superscription, and yet may not be worth so much as a good shilling. So will it be with the bad Christian. In spite of his having been baptized in the name of Christ, a good heathen is far more pleasing in the sight of God.

To those among you therefore, my brethren, who are still in your sins, I say, depart from iniquity; cease to do evil; leave off your evil courses; and turn to God in penitence and prayer.

Is any present, who has been tempted to indulge in strong drink? To him, I say, refrain from it; keep away from the public-house, from the beer-shop; give up your jovial companions: they may laugh at you for it: but never mind that laugh, so long as you feel that Christ is smiling on you, and that the angels are rejoicing over you. Has any been tempted to leave the path of truth? To him I say, put away lying, and speak the truth in everything to your neighbour. Is any dishonest? To him I say, steal no more; keep your hands from your neighbour's property; take no advantage of his ignorance, or of his necessities; deal justly and fairly by him in everything. If there be any present, who have hitherto contented themselves with being what the world calls good sort of men, to them I say, remember that the Gospel requires holiness of you. Strive therefore to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour: strive to become Christians in reality, as well as in profession: seek to obtain that spirit of Christ, which is never refused to fervent prayer, and the study of the word of God. Lastly, to those who have already set their faces toward the heavenly city, and whose heart bears them joyful testimony that they have begun to take the law of God for their rule of life,—to those what need be said, but that ye pray more earnestly, trust more entirely,

love with greater warmth of heart, and greater purity of soul? Let this be the matter of your prayers, that, as God has begun his good work in you, he will bring the same to full effect, and that, as you have already received how you ought to walk and to please God, you may abound in the same more and more, so that every succeeding year, as it passes along with you, may bring you nearer to God, and may ripen you more and more for heaven.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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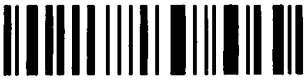
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